CONSIDERING CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL III

THINKING & SINGING

Bernard Sharratt

New Crisis Quarterly

CONSIDERING CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

III

NCQ TITLES

Considering Canterbury Cathedral I : History Death Time
Considering Canterbury Cathedral II : Art Science Money
Considering Canterbury Cathedral III : Thinking & Singing

Essays

Legal Fictions
Politics & Letters
On Yeats: Upon a House
Drama & Democracy
Locating Theology
Time Pieces
Critical Paranoia
On Joyce: three easy essays
On Eliot: these fragments
Literary Conversions

Eliotics

Film texts

A Trip to Rome
A Short Break in Budapest
Magic in Prague
A Week in Venice
Four Days in Athens
The Last Priest of Horus
WWW: the weekend that warped the world

Play texts

Darwin: an evolutionary entertainment
Strange Meetings & Shorts

Forthcoming

On Collecting Walter Benjamin
Autobiography & Class Consciousness

Though each can be read independently,
these NCQ publications, taken together,
comprise a single hyper-text collection.

CONSIDERING

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

III

THINKING & SINGING

ANSELM & THE CHOIR

Bernard Sharratt

New Crisis Quarterly
2024

NEW CRISIS QUARTERLY

ncq@newcrisisquarterly.myzen.co.uk

ISBN 978-1-910956-24-3

First published 2024

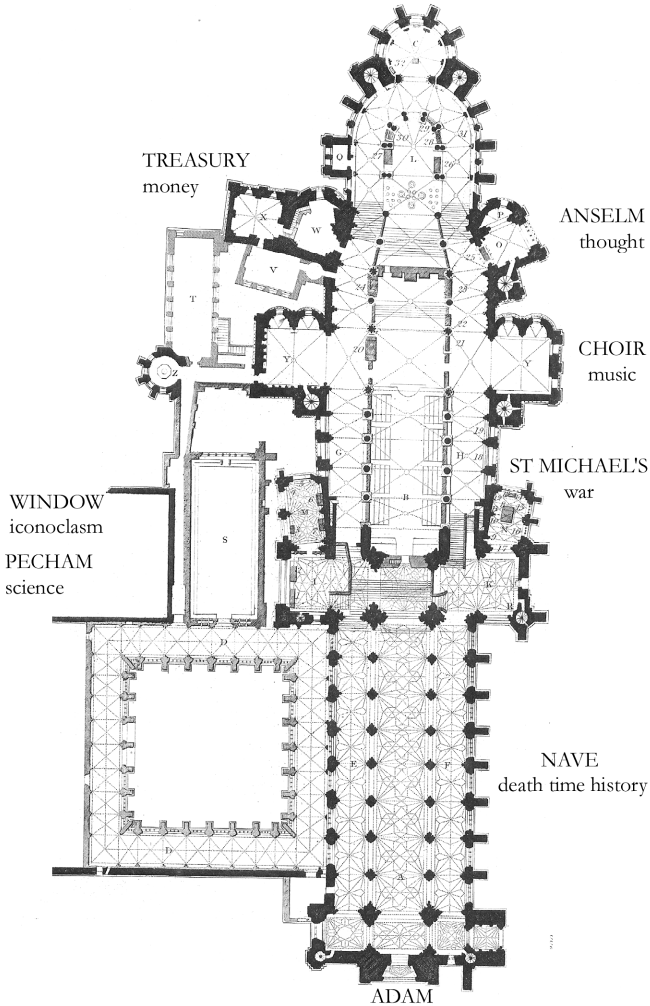
© Bernard Sharratt 2024

Cover images are of the incised name of Anselm in the Anselm Chapel
and a manuscript of a polyphonic composition by John Dunstable,
Preco preheminencie, in the Cathedral Archive CCA-DCc-Add MS-128_6r

Everyone should live in their own cathedral.
(1968 Situationist slogan)

For Marion

with love and thanks for
being very patient
helping me think
and singing a lot


TREASURY
money
ANSELM
thought
CHOIR
music
ST MICHAEL'S
war
WINDOW
iconoclasm
PECHAM
science
NAVE
death time history
ADAM
time

preamble III

Canterbury Cathedral is rather large. So is this book. What began as a leisurely stroll has grown into a fairly long walk. So, simply for convenience, this volume is now one of three. I'd prefer that you read all three, consecutively, but as with visiting the cathedral you can always skip, or wander, or browse what happens to interest you. Nevertheless, I hope the whole project might be read as a single rather meandering essay. And you can take your own time.

Works about cathedrals fall into familiar categories: tourist guide, architectural history, lavishly illustrated coffee-table book. There's also a library of scholarly studies, and numerous books on the religious function of cathedrals, their place in contemporary society, and so on. I didn't want to write any of those.

For many years I had the task, when family and friends visited Canterbury, of being the one to 'show them round' the cathedral. It's a pleasant way to spend a few hours, and I've learned a great deal, not just about the cathedral. I've also recognised that people have very different ranges of prior knowledge, so getting the tone right between stating the obvious and offering overwhelming detail is always tricky. This essay is intended to be like a conversational ramble with a patient friend, but as an old academic I can't wholly avoid a seminar or lecture mode. But what else would you expect from considering a cathedral?

In particular, I know that my own reaction, when visiting other cathedrals, is that just being told the dates of long-dead bishops, or details about the masonry, or the style of arches, doesn't match what a building such as Canterbury Cathedral evokes, or clarify what the place seems to say to a visitor who is awed or impressed or puzzled by it. A cathedral invites us to think about rather large issues which are difficult to get into focus.

Meandering through the cathedral I remember T. S. Eliot's phrase about allowing a 'half-formed thought to pass'. As we drift and gaze and comment, we are half-conscious of a complex set of responses, but we're tempted simply to shrug and wander on. Trying to articulate how we are responding to this unique place takes more time than people have in a short visit.

So this is an attempt to follow through some of my own 'half-formed' thoughts prompted by the cathedral. I've ended up considering a variety of issues in a loose relation to different parts of the building, as the plan opposite indicates.

In the first part I tried to think about history and historians, the past, death, and time The second part was concerned with some issues around art and iconoclasm, with aspects of the history of science, and problems about money or economics. These last two segments are concerned with the odd business of thinking, and finally with music.

But how do you put a cathedral into a book?

Partly by using lots of quotations. I've treated the many quotations as retrieved fragments of the past, like the surviving stones of the building itself. The essay is not intended as a scholarly work and I haven't used footnotes but hope I've given enough information on my sources to make them easy enough to find on the net. I've tried to respect the 'fair use' conventions of copyright and I use my own translations (and my son's) where possible. To have included colour illustrations would have more than doubled the price of the book, but it's easy to find appropriate images of the cathedral.

The sub-headings are simply to help you find your way about, since there are many points to pause over and consider or query, but at least, unlike a real visit, you can take as much time as you like. Ideally, as in old-fashioned books, I would have incorporated a silk thread as a place marker.

This final volume includes some personal acknowlegements at the end.

We are now more than half-way through the Cathedral and can soon relax with some music. But first, some thinking about thinking, with the help of Anselm.

So, if you would care to accompany me…

THINKING WITH ANSELM

I have been visiting Canterbury Cathedral for several decades, often in a throng of tourists and sometimes with just a friend or two. Almost always, the quietist and emptiest spot is the small chapel on the south side of the ambulatory around the choir and sanctuary. Not many visitors enter it, and those who do usually leave after a few moments. There is little to see. Certainly nothing of splendour. Tucked away high in a corner, and almost out of sight, there is a fragment of a mediaeval wall painting, mentioned in some guide-books. In the apse there is an altar, basically a large block of black marble, with the name 'Anselm' simply inscribed on the step leading up to it. There is one other tomb, of undistinguished stone, with an epitaph with a name unfamiliar to most of us. So this side-room chapel is among the least impressive places in the whole cathedral. Yet it remains one of my favourite spots. Peaceful, quiet, somewhere to sit and think. Which is appropriate. Since the chapel is dedicated to one of the most interesting of European thinkers.

Anselm's life was discussed in some detail in my comments on the nave, particularly in relation to the historian Eadmer's writings about him. A very brief reminder: he was born in the 1030s, was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to his death in 1109, and was canonised as a Saint in the late 15th century. Anselm was presumably buried at Canterbury but in the chapel now dedicated to him there is no gravestone for him or any other marker of an actual burial.

Indeed, in 1752, when the Cathedral was approached by King Charles Emmanuel for permission to translate Anselm's relics to Italy, Archbishop Herring is recorded as saying that "parting with the rotten Remains of a Rebel to his King, a Slave to the Popedom, and an Enemy to the married Clergy" would be of no great concern, and he would even "make no Conscience of palming on the Simpletons any other old Bishop with the Name of Anselm". Nothing came of the request and no grave location was ever confirmed.

One person whom we know for sure is buried within St Anselm's Chapel is Thomas Bradwardine, who was Archbishop of Canterbury for scarcely more than a month in 1349 and in effect visited the Cathedral only to be buried there. His tomb has a fine inscription, incorporating a phrase from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* which almost ranks Bradwardine with Augustine and Boethius. Known as Doctor Profundus, in his time Bradwardine was a major theologian but is now remembered if at all as a pioneer of mathematical inquiries into velocity at an instant, and for using exponential functions to explain the laws of motion. It seems discourteous simply to ignore him, but I want to concentrate on thinking about Anselm.

So far, in my meandering consideration of the cathedral, the various physical areas have been somewhat arbitrarily associated with different disciplines, different domains of thinking: the nave and history, Pecham's

tomb and science, the Treasury and economics, and so on, each regarded as a particular form of intellectual inquiry. In considering Anselm's chapel I now want to think, as it were, about thinking itself. Which is a somewhat problematic notion.

Anselm is today most remembered for the phrase '*fides quaerens intellectum*', usually translated as 'faith seeking understanding', though *intellectum* can also be taken as meaning something more like 'intelligence' or 'mind', often regarded as the distinguishing characteristic of being human. But we now have a somewhat fuzzy notion of 'artificial intelligence', as a kind of 'thinking' not by humans but by computers. In focusing on Anselm's work I want to explore a range of issues, and not only those associated with belief, faith, or theology, the most obvious topics to explore when considering a cathedral.

Anselm's current reputation is not primarily as a saint or theologian but as a philosopher, the author of the so-called 'ontological proof' for the existence of God. Whether God exists is a not unimportant issue if one is visiting a cathedral, but discussing Anselm's 'proof' does not necessarily involve assessing its validity, even though making up your own mind about the 'ontological argument' might well entail reconsidering your personal belief. However, in considering Anselm's process of thinking in his *Proslogion* I am not concerned so much with the specific discipline of 'theology' but rather with the issue of 'thinking' more generally. For a start, how do I even think about thinking?

giddiness

There can be a kind of giddiness involved in trying to think about 'thinking'. We tend to deploy rather loosely such notions as 'mind', perhaps imagined as a peculiar kind of space inside the brain or skull, or vaguely visualised as a dark interior, endless in its extent, almost as we might imagine deep space itself. The curious and elusive inhabitant of that space we might think of as our 'soul' or 'spirit', or what the philosopher Gilbert Ryle memorably characterised as 'the ghost in the machine'. The process of 'thinking' may be felt as not even located 'inside' the brain at all but as somehow non-corporeal, immaterial. We might even experience quasi-verbal thinking as occurring in a strangely audible but otherwise inaccessible 'interior', yet not located at some specific place which the ears can pinpoint in normal physical space. So we might ask not only what thinking is but where it is. 'In our mind'?

The way we loosely use the term 'mind' can also be variously taken to refer to 'consciousness', 'self-consciousness', or consciousness of the 'self' – which may include the notion that my 'self' or 'soul' is somehow what makes me the individual 'I' am and enables me to 'think'. If that soul is somehow an immaterial spirit then, it is often argued or vaguely supposed, the self can perhaps survive the demise of the physical body. The notions

of 'spirit' and 'consciousness' can then be associated with the idea of an a-material and perhaps a-temporal God, conceived or quasi-imagined along similar lines as a 'spirit', but – unlike our individual mind – as somehow both everywhere and in every time, omnipresent and eternal. We may also use words like 'spirit' or 'soul' as a kind of shorthand for various activities or processes which we indicate by such terms as willing, deciding, choosing, but the activity of 'thinking' remains particularly elusive.

Since 'thinking' can also sometimes be experienced as an almost instant insight, this may also reinforce a notion that 'spirit' is somehow non-temporal. Or perhaps we might envisage the transition from 'thinking' to a completed 'thought' as the sudden consolidation of various sequential processes, like the last digit completing a sequence of numbers which taken together open a combination lock. Similarly, a 'thought' can sometimes be experienced as a sudden and even unexpected result of 'making connections'.

On the other hand, we can be very aware of the peculiar relationship between the process of thinking and the time 'it takes'. The rough notes from which I am dictating this section were originally two scrappy pages scribbled in a few minutes while nearly falling asleep, but it has taken some time to shape a more or less acceptable prose version of which those notes were some kind of rapid and elliptical shorthand, encapsulating in a few jottings a considerable amount of later 'thought'. The prose version you have just read is not a transcription but an attempted reconstruction of the connections which were indicated, almost as a sketchy diagram, and jotted down in those few moments of insomniac rumination. A densely complex 'thought' can sometimes seem captured in a few rapid lines of scrawl – which may afterwards prove an almost indecipherable and unfortunately irrecoverable 'half-thought'. In my case, arthritic hand-writing combined with inadequate dictation software may make any retrieved 'thought' utterly unreliable and incoherent anyway.

Taken together, these various cliché notions or motifs perhaps amount to a fairly familiar model of what we might experience as 'thinking', and most of the time we can get along quite contentedly without probing much further into what sense we make of that vague model. However, faced with Anselm's so-called 'ontological proof' we can find that we are puzzlingly unsure of what we are doing as we try to 'think it through'. The odd feature of Anselm's argument is that it seems to be not primarily sequential, linear, or syllogistic, but presents itself as having been a kind of instantaneous conclusion, a formulation folding upon itself to imply a degree of self-evidence, or the sudden understanding of an implication. The argument may somehow 'click', as it seems to have done for Anselm himself after several days of frustrating effort. Or it may not, for some readers. But what then is involved in understanding that kind of understanding?

You will have noticed that so far I have not even outlined this so-called ontological argument, and it will be some time before I do so.

Let me first quote two of the most vivid descriptions of the process of 'thinking' to be found in any mediaeval document. One is in the preface by Anselm himself to his text entitled *Proslogion* and the other is in the *Life of Anselm* written by Eadmer, which we considered from a different perspective earlier. Chapter 19 of Eadmer's *Life* is headed :

> Concerning the books which he wrote, and what first happened to the one which he called the *Proslogion*.
> At this period he wrote three treatises: *On Truth*, *On the Freedom of the Will*, and *On the Fall of the Devil*. . . He also composed another small book, which he called the *Monologion*. In this he alone spoke and argued with himself and while remaining silent concerning all authority of Holy Scripture, he enquired into and discovered by reason alone what God is, and what the true faith holds God to be, he proved by invincible reason that it could not be other than it is. Afterwards it came into his mind to try to prove by one single and short argument what is believed and proclaimed about God, that he is eternal, unchangeable, omnipotent, omnipresent, incom-prehensible, just, righteous, merciful, true, truth, goodness, justice and not otherwise and how all these are one in him.
>
> Which matters, as he himself acknowledged, caused him great difficulty. Partly because such thinking took away his desire for food, drink and sleep, and which concerned him more it disturbed the attention which he ought to have paid to matins and to the divine office at other times.
>
> When he considered this, yet could not entirely grasp what he was searching for, he supposed that this line of thought was a temptation by the devil and he tried to dispel it far from his mind. But the more he tried to dissuade himself, the thought more and more preoccupied him. Then suddenly one night during the night office the grace of God illuminated his heart, it all became clear to his mind, and a great joy and delight filled his inner being. Reckoning therefore that others too would be pleased if they knew what he had found, he immediately and without stint wrote it down on writing tablets and gave them to one of the brethren of the monastery for safe-keeping.
>
> A few days later he asked the monk in charge of them for the tablets. The place where they had been deposited was searched, but they were not to be found. The brethren were asked whether anyone had taken them, but with no result. And to this day no-one has been found who has admitted that he knew anything about them. Anselm prepared another writing on the same subject on other tablets, and entrusted them to the same monk for more careful keeping. He placed them once more by his bed, in a more secret place, and the next day with no

suspicion of any mischief he found them strewn on the floor beside his bed and the wax which was on them scattered in bits. After the tablets had been picked up and the wax fragments gathered, they were handed over to Anselm. He pieced together the wax and barely managed to retrieve the writing. Fearing it might be altogether lost by some carelessness, he ordered it, in the name of the Lord, to be copied onto parchment. From this, therefore, he composed a small volume, but one full of weighty enquiries and subtle accreditations, which he called the *Proslogion*. Because in this work he speaks either to himself or to God.

Anselm himself gives a shorter account in the prologue or proemium to the *Proslogion* (as translated by Sidney Norton Deane):

> After I had published, at the solicitous entreaties of certain brethren, a brief work [the *Monologion*] as an example of meditation on the grounds of faith, in the person of one who investigates, in a course of silent reasoning with himself, matters of which he is ignorant; considering that this book was knit together by the linking of many arguments, I began to ask myself whether there might be found a single argument which would require no other for its proof than itself alone (*unum argumentum quod nullo alio ad se probandum quam se solo indigeret*) and alone would suffice to demonstrate that God truly exists, and that there is a supreme good requiring nothing else, which all other things require for their existence and well-being; and whatever we believe regarding the divine being.
>
> Although I often and earnestly directed my thought to this end, and at some times that which I sought seemed to be just within my reach, while again it wholly evaded my mental vision, at last in despair I was about to cease, as if from the search for a thing which could not be found. But when I wished to exclude this thought altogether, lest, by busying my mind to no purpose, it should keep me from other thoughts, in which I might be successful; then more and more, though I was unwilling and shunned it, it began to force itself upon me, with a kind of importunity. So, one day, when I was exceedingly wearied with resisting its importunity, in the very conflict of my thoughts, what I had despaired of offered itself, so that I eagerly embraced the thoughts which I was strenuously repelling.
>
> Thinking, therefore, that what I rejoiced to have found, would, if put in writing, be welcome to some readers, of this very matter, and of some others, I have written the following treatise, in the person of one who strives to lift his mind to the contemplation of God, seeking to understand what he believes (*quarentis intelligere quod credit*).
>
> In my judgement, neither this work nor the other, which I mentioned above, deserved to be called a book, or to bear the name of an author; and yet I thought they ought not to be sent forth without some title by

> which they might, in some sort, invite one into whose hands they fell to their perusal. I accordingly gave each a title, that the first might be known as *An Example of Meditation on the Grounds of Faith*, (*exemplum meditandi de ratione fidei*) and its sequel as *Faith Seeking Understanding* (*fides quaerens intellectum*). But after both had been copied by many people under these titles, several urged me, and especially Hugo, the reverend Archbishop of Lyons, who discharges the apostolic office in Gaul, who instructed me to this effect on his apostolic authority, to prefix my name to these writings. So that this might be done more fittingly, I named the first, *Monologion*, that is, a soliloquy (*soliloquium*) but the second, *Proslogion*, that is, an address (*alloquium*).

Consider some aspects of these two extraordinary passages. Anselm struggles to find the precise expression or formulation for the 'single argument' that he is looking for, instead of 'the linking of many arguments' he had offered in his previous treatise, the *Monologion*, and it finally dawns upon him, quite suddenly, as a kind of immediate insight. He says he chose to write it down for the sake of his fellow monks and possible readers, but presumably this was not the whole prose formulation of the complete *Proslogion* (some 30 printed pages?) that 'offered' itself to him in that illuminating moment during Matins. Eadmer emphasises Anselm's need to get 'what he had found' written down and his anxiety when the first written formulation was lost. And then the second version was also partly destroyed.

Anselm himself does not mention the peculiar business about the missing and broken tablets, but the implication of Eadmer's narrative is that the insight was such that if the written versions were lost so too was the exact formulation of the crucial insight. If it had been so desperately difficult in the first place to arrive at a precise understanding or articulation, one might question whether the second and third attempts to write down the insight were indeed faithful to the actual first moment of insight which had occurred 'a few days' earlier. Only after Anselm had reconstructed the fragments of writing from the second set of tablets 'with difficulty' was a version based upon them finally written onto parchment and safely preserved.

Eadmer's account reminds me of an anecdote once told me by the critic F. R. Leavis about an evening he spent with Ludwig Wittgenstein. Leavis felt that Wittgenstein had somewhat overstayed his visit, and to persuade him to leave reminded him that he was due to give a talk at the Moral Sciences Club the following day and that perhaps he should go home to prepare it. Wittgenstein at first reacted by saying that he had no need to leave, since he knew perfectly well what he was intending to say. But then quite suddenly Wittgenstein struck his forehead in a kind of panic and dashed for the door. Alarmed by this over-reaction, Leavis reassured him: "But you said you know what you are going to say!" Wittgenstein replied:

"Of course I know what I am going to say. *But I haven't written it down yet. And I might die tonight.*"

in intellectu

There are, it seems, several processes involved in Anselm's discovering or constructing what became known as the 'ontological argument'. There is the attempt to arrive at an elusive thought, which involves a considerable amount of frustrated 'work of thinking'. There is then a moment of illumination. Then the writing down which finally 'fixes' the thought and protects its fragility or vulnerability, since until a process of 'thinking' takes the form of a reiterable assertion or formulation, whether spoken or written, there is in a sense no 'thought' – in much the way that, say, William Morris might have regarded the labour involved in a 'work of art' as only complete if an actual art-work is achieved.

Anselm himself uses the analogy of a painter, in *Proslogion*, chapter 2, to make a somewhat different point:

> when a painter thinks beforehand (*praecogitat*) what he is going to execute, he has something in his understanding (*in intellectu*), but he does not yet think that it actually exists because he has not yet executed it. However, when he has actually painted it, then he both has it in his understanding and understands that it exists because he has now made it (*habet in intellectu et intelligit esse quod iam fecit*).

The work of thinking can, it seems, involve a struggle to arrive at a set of connections which are repeatedly liable to disconnection or dissolution, a pattern or sequence which remains vulnerable to forgetting or distortion and which may be irrecoverable unless shaped into a formulation which can be repeated and copied, and perhaps in a literal sense re-traced once it takes the form of a written text or verbal utterance, which is quotable and repeatable. It may then be important precisely how one writes 'it' down, and like a poem or a joke it may be crucial that the exact wording is followed or reproduced. For example, I have just described this process in two different ways, but do the two accounts articulate precisely the 'same thought'?

That we can sometimes tell a joke 'in our own words' may be part of what 'understanding' the joke means, while in the case of a poem our own words, as a paraphrase, summary, or translation, will not 'mean the same' as the poem, or 'have the same effect'. In some instances, at least, there is only one adequate form of words. Yet we may sometimes say the original words, or repeat them 'mechanically' (as we say), without 'understanding' them. As I might literally repeat the ontological proof as formulated in Anselm's own Latin even if I do not understand his Latin. Which is quite different from retracing the struggle to arrive at or understand a 'proof' but without eventually agreeing with it, or regarding it as finally coherent.

Chapter 4 in the *Proslogion* seems to be trying to clarify a related distinction between reading with and without 'understanding'. A 19th-century English translation of that chapter added a preliminary formulation (here italicised) of its argument which was not part of Anselm's own text :

> How the fool has said in his heart what cannot be conceived.
> – *A thing may be conceived in two ways: (1) when the word signifying it is conceived; (2) when the thing itself is understood. As far as the word goes, God can be conceived not to exist; in reality he cannot.*
>
> How has the fool said in his heart what he could not conceive (*cogitare*); or how is it that he could not conceive what he said in his heart? since it is the same to say in the heart and to conceive (*dicere incorde et cogitare*). But if really, indeed since really, he both conceived, because he said in his heart; and did not say in his heart, because he could not conceive, there is more than one way in which a thing is said in the heart or conceived. For, in one sense, an object is conceived, when the word signifying it is conceived; and in another, when the very entity, which the object is, is understood (*intelligitur*).

In reading this passage, are you confident that you have 'understood' what Anselm was thinking, or saying, or writing? Or what he meant by conceiving 'in his heart'? Does the added preliminary summary 'mean the same' as what follows in the chapter itself? Other English translations use the term 'think' where this version uses 'conceive'. Anselm used the Latin terms *cogitare* and *intelligere*. So what are the differences between thinking and understanding? Let us step back a bit.

philosophy

What we call 'philosophy' has often been taken to be a matter of 'thinking' and Anselm's *Proslogion* has acted as a continuing spur to thinking in philosophy. One could almost write a history of Western philosophy by tracing the responses to Anselm's argument, by Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, etc. Note again that I have not yet actually quoted Anselm's 'own' formulation of the so-called ontological argument. Before I do so, you might consider whether the following excerpts from some of the commentators on Anselm constitute the 'same argument' even as each other, and in particular how the different ways in which they are written shape the arguments presented.

Thomas Aquinas's version or rendition remains perhaps the most concise. Aquinas considers what he regards as Anselm's argument alongside one by John of Damascus. As usual, Aquinas first rehearses the positions of others, then offers his own, and finally critiques the positions he rejects. Note that only the single phrase I have italicised is actually quoted by

Aquinas directly from Anselm's own text. Here is part of *Summa theologiae, prima pars*, Quaestio 2, which begins by citing other arguments:

> *Article 1.* Whether the existence of God is self-evident?
> *1.* It seems that the existence of God is self-evident. Now those things are said to be self-evident to us the knowledge of which is naturally implanted in us, as we can see in regard to first principles. But as the Damascene says, 'the knowledge of God is naturally implanted in all.' Therefore the existence of God is self-evident.
> *2.* Further, those things are said to be self-evident which are known as soon as the terms are known, which the Philosopher says is true of the first principles of demonstration. Thus, when the nature of a whole and of a part is known, it is at once recognized that every whole is greater than its part.
>
> But as soon as the signification of the word 'God' is understood, it is at once seen that God exists. For by this word is signified *that than which nothing greater can be conceived.* But that which exists actually and mentally is greater than that which exists only mentally. Therefore, since as soon as the word 'God' is understood it exists mentally, it also follows that it exists actually. Therefore the proposition 'God exists' is self-evident.
> (*Sed intellecto quid significet hoc nomen Deus, statim habetur quod Deus est. Significatur enim hoc nomine id quo maius significari non potest: maius autem est quod est in re et intellectu, quam quod est in intellectu tantum: unde cum, intellecto hoc nomine Deus, statim sit in intellectu, sequitur etiam quod sit in re. Ergo Deum esse est per se notum.*)

To this Aquinas counterposes the following (citing Aristotle, and echoing a biblical text quoted by Anselm):

> On the contrary: No one can mentally admit the opposite of what is self-evident; as the Philosopher states concerning the first principles of demonstration. But the opposite of the proposition 'God is' can be mentally admitted: 'The fool said in his heart, There is no God' (Psalm 13:2). Therefore, that God exists is not self-evident.

Aquinas then states his own position:

> I answer that: A thing can be self-evident in either of two ways: on the one hand, self-evident in itself, though not to us; on the other, self-evident in itself, and to us. A proposition is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence of the subject, as 'Man is an animal', for animal is contained in the essence of man. If, therefore, the essence of the predicate and subject be known to all, the proposition will be self-evident to all; as is clear with regard to the first principles of

demonstration, the terms of which are common things that no one is ignorant of, such as being and non-being, whole and part, and such like.

If, however, there are some to whom the essence of the predicate and subject is unknown, the proposition may be self-evident in itself, but not to those who do not know the meaning of the predicate and subject of the proposition. Therefore, it happens, as Boethius says, 'that there are some mental concepts self-evident only to the learned, as that incorporeal substances are not in space'. Therefore I say that this proposition, 'God exists', is of itself self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence as will be hereafter shown. But because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature – namely, by effects.

Finally, Aquinas answers or replies to the opening positions he had considered earlier:

Reply to 1. To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. For man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him. This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching; for there are many who imagine that man's perfect good which is happiness, consists in riches, and others in pleasures, and others in something else.

Reply to 2. Perhaps not everyone who hears this word 'God' understands it to signify *that than which nothing greater can be thought*, seeing that some have believed God to be a body. Yet, even granted that everyone understands that by this word 'God' is signified *something than which nothing greater can be thought*, nevertheless, it does not therefore follow that he understands that what the word signifies exists actually, but only that it exists mentally. Nor can it be argued that it actually exists, unless it be admitted that there actually exists *that than which nothing greater can be thought*; and this is precisely what is not admitted by those who hold that God does not exist.

(*Ad secundum dicendum quod forte ille qui audit hoc nomen Deus, non intelligit significari aliquid quo maius cogitari non possit, cum quidam crediderint Deum esse corpus. Dato etiam quod quilibet intelligat hoc nomine Deus significari hoc quod dicitur, scilicet illud quo maius cogitari non potest; non tamen propter hoc sequitur quod intelligat id quod significatur per nomen, esse in rerum natura; sed in apprehensione intellectus tantum. Nec potest argui quod sit in re, nisi daretur quod sit in re aliquid quo maius cogitari non potest: quod non est datum a ponentibus Deum non esse.*)

Note again that except for the repeated italicised phrase, Aquinas does not quote Anselm's actual argument, but elaborates his own version of the propositions he discusses. The implication is that Anselm's argument can be abstracted from its overall context and its exact formulation. How far Aquinas's version matches that of Anselm is then a matter for debate. Clearly, however, Aquinas is treating Anselm's position as a sequence of steps in a logical argument, rather than as the single illumination Anselm said he was seeking.

Now compare a different rendition. In the *Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (2004), Brian Davies provides a version of the ontological argument which recognises that translating Anselm's Latin may be difficult. Davies gives two versions of the proof, depending on how one might translate the phrase '*si cum vel in solo intellectu est potest cogitari esse et in re quod maius est.'* Both Davies's versions (on p. 160) are laid out on the page as a sequence of 'propositions' clearly arranged as separate steps in a numbered chain of argument. Davies writes:

> [Anselm's] argument would seem to be:
> 1. God is something than which nothing greater can be thought.
> 2. God exists in the mind since even the fool can think of (have in mind) something than which nothing greater can be thought.
> 3. But God cannot just be in the mind since it is greater to be in reality than it is to be only in the mind and since God is something than which nothing greater can be thought.

Alternatively, using a different translation of the Latin phrase specified earlier:

> 1. God is something than which nothing greater can be thought.
> 2. God exists in the mind since even the fool can think of (have in mind) something than which nothing greater can be thought.
> 3. But we can think of something which is greater than something existing only in the mind.
> 4. So something than which nothing greater can be thought cannot only exist in the mind.

A few pages later (p. 163) Davies also offers a version of *Proslogion* chapter 3:

> Anselm seeks to establish [his] conclusion by means of the following argument:
> 1. We can think of something existing which cannot be thought not to exist.
> 2. Such a thing would be greater than something which can be thought not to exist.

3. So something than which nothing greater can be thought cannot be something which can be thought not to exist.
4. So something than which nothing greater can be thought cannot be thought not to exist.

Arranging an argument in this form of a schematic organisation of a series of separate propositions linked together as a rational or logical argument is not the only way of presenting 'the ontological argument'. But this was often the preferred way of presenting any modern philosophical argument, at least in mid-20th-century Anglo-American academic circles. Moreover, a philosophical argument was frequently presented as a matter of symbolic logic.

Here, for example, is a version of the ontological argument in symbolic logic notation from 'On the Logic of the Ontological Argument', by Paul E. Oppenheimer and Edward N. Zalta, originally published in *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 5, *Philosophy of Religion* (1991). Since it is highly dubious whether their notation would survive correctly if transcribed into my available fonts I offer a snip image:

The Ontological Argument

From *Premise 1*, it follows that $\exists!x\varphi_1$, by *Lemma 2*. From this, it follows that $\exists y(y = \imath x\varphi_1)$, by *Description Theorem 1*. From this, it follows that: $C\imath x\varphi_1$ & $\neg\exists y(Gy\imath x\varphi_1$ & $Cy)$, by *Description Theorem 2*.

Now, for *reductio*, assume: $\neg E!\imath x\varphi_1$. Then, by *Premise 2*, it follows that $\exists y(Gy\imath x\varphi_1$ & $Cy)$, which is a contradiction. So $\neg\neg E!\imath x\varphi_1$, i.e., $E!\imath x\varphi_1$. And by D_1, it follows that $E!g$, i.e., God exists. ⋈

Oppenheimer and Zalta comment : 'This is a valid argument. It is simple, elegant, and faithful to the text.' They also apparently used an automated theorem-prover known as 'Prover9' to test Anselm's ontological thesis. Prover9 subsequently discovered a simpler, formally valid ontological argument from a single non-logical premise, published as Oppenheimer and Zalta, 'A Computationally-Discovered Simplification of the Ontological Argument', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 89 (2): 333–349, (2011). Other symbolic logic versions are available.

In 1967 D. P. Henry published *The logic of Saint Anselm*, and in his later survey *Medieval Logic and Metaphysics* the concluding chapter is dedicated to Anselm's ontological argument. On the final page, after formulating Henry's own version as a complex symbolic logic chain, he tries to put the proof into words, with cross-references to his earlier tabulated formulations:

Anselm holds that confining that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought to the understanding makes it 'less great' than it is if it is also in reality. But if (as is clear from 3.110, 3.130, 3.4, and so on) he holds that this being-than-which-a-more-great-cannot-be-thought is at least in the under-standing, then on similar grounds he should also admit that it cannot exist in reality, since this would entail its being more great than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be thought, which is impossible. The alleged possibility of thought ('it can be thought also to exist in fact') mentioned in 3.21 becomes an impossibility. One can think of nothing greater than the greatest.

Hence on his own principles the vital section of the argument which we have been considering could equally well (or even more feasibly) read:

3.20 It is certain that that-than-which-a-more-great-cannot-be-thought must only be in the understanding.

3.21 For if it is at least in the understanding, it cannot be thought also to exist in fact, since this would be more great.

3.22 On this account if that-than-which-a-more-great-cannot-be-thought exists in fact, then

3.221 that very thing than which a more great is not able to be thought is that than which a more great is able to be thought.

3.3 But obviously this (3.221) cannot be.

3.4 Hence without any doubt something-than-which-a-more-great-is-not-able-to-be-thought cannot exist both in the understanding and in fact. [QED]

In case your eyes have glazed over a little, it is worth clearly registering and emphasising that in the conclusion of this version Henry has apparently turned Anselm's argument on its head. See 3.4 above.

As well as the temptation to try to reformulate Anselm's argument, modern philosophers have also found it irresistible to offer various parodic versions, of which my favourite is probably a version of the following:

> Anselm's ontological proof is the proof of the existence of God than which no more successful proof can be conceived. A proof which proves the existence of God succeeds more than one that does not. Therefore Anselm's ontological proof proves the existence of God.

Or:

> The best version of the ontological argument is one that successfully proves the ontological argument. There must be a best version of the ontological argument. So there must be a successful ontological argument.

These parodies are versions of the very first objection to the 'ontological proof', which circulated almost as soon as Anselm's own argument did, and was attributed to an otherwise unknown monk named Gaunilo, who wrote a response *On Behalf of the Fool* (*pro insipiente*) to whom Anselm promptly wrote a further response. That exchange, as we shall see, suggests why the several attempted 'versions' I have quoted are arguably misguided and misleading.

Gaunilo

In the continuing argument about the meaning or validity of the *Proslogion*, a question persists as to whether or not, or in what sense, Anselm intended the 'ontological argument' to be the kind of 'proof' which later philosophers have assumed it to be. There is no doubt that Anselm's stated intention in the earlier *Monologion* was to demonstrate that the essential components of a theistic belief could be established on rational grounds alone, without appeal to traditional or scriptural authority. But are the core passages of the *Proslogion* what we would now call a philosophical argument at all? It is time surely, to look at Anselm's own text.

However, any copy of the *Proslogion* was henceforth, on his own instructions, always to include the exchange with Gaunilo. So should we consider Anselm's response to Gaunilo first? Given how available it is online and otherwise, I'm not going to discuss Gaunilo's own complete argument, but offer a summary version of it:

> . . they say that there is in the ocean somewhere an island which, because of the difficulty (or rather the impossibility) of finding that which does not exist, some have called the 'Lost Island.' And the story goes that it is blessed with all manner of priceless riches and delights in abundance . . and . . is superior everywhere in abundance to all those other lands that men inhabit. Now, if anyone tells me that it is like this, I shall easily understand what is said, since nothing is difficult about it. But if he should then go on to say, as though it were a logical consequence of this: You cannot doubt that this island that is more excellent than all other islands truly exists somewhere in reality than you can doubt that it is in your mind; and since it is more excellent to exist not only in the mind alone but also in reality, therefore it must needs be that it exists. For if it did not exist, any other island existing in reality would be more excellent than it, and so this island, already conceived by you to be more excellent than others, will not be more excellent. If, I say, someone wishes thus to persuade me that this island really exists beyond all doubt, I should either think that he was joking, or I should find it hard to decide which of us I ought to judge the bigger fool – I, if I agreed with him, or he, if he thought that he had proved the existence of this island.

Anselm responded to Gaunilo in a way that most subsequent commentators have found unsatisfactory. Anselm's reply implies that he did not himself regard the issue as entirely 'philosophical', since he responds to Gaunilo by explicitly appealing to the fact that Gaunilo was a Catholic monk. The reply begins (my emphases):

> Since it is not the fool [in Psalm 13], against whom the argument of my little book was directed, who takes me to task in this criticism, but the author of these objections who is by no means a fool, and is a Catholic, speaking on behalf of the fool, *I think it sufficient that I answer the Catholic* (*sufficere mihi potest respondere catholico*).

The final section of Anselm's reply nevertheless reaffirms that (my empasis):

> I think that I have shown *by an argument which is not weak, but sufficiently cogent,* that in my book I *proved* (*puto quia monstravi me non infirma sed satis necessari argumentatione probasse*) the real existence of a being than which a greater cannot be conceived; and I believe that *this argument cannot be invalidated by the validity of any objection* (*nec eam alicuius obiectionis infirmari firmitate*). For so great force does the signification of this phrase contain in itself (*huius prolationis in se continent significatio*), that this being which is the subject of discussion, is of necessity, from the very fact that it is understood or conceived, proved (*probetur*) also to exist in reality, and to be whatever we should believe of the divine substance.

Yet how can a 'proof' rest upon (only) working when offered to a Catholic? Hardly what we might classify as a philosophical proof. And how could an argument *not* be 'invalidated by the validity of any objection'?

'prologue'

Yet if we now go back and carefully re-read the 'prologue' to the *Proslogion* this apparent sleight of hand, or of logic, is both clarified and made even more elusive or puzzling. Anselm's text says:

> After I had published, at the solicitous entreaties of certain brethren, a brief work (the *Monologion*) as an example of meditation on the grounds of faith, in the person of one who investigates, in a course of silent reasoning with himself, matters of which he is ignorant; considering that this book was knit together by the linking of many arguments, I began to ask myself whether there might be found a single argument which would require no other for its proof than itself alone; and alone would suffice to demonstrate that God truly exists, and that there is a supreme good requiring nothing else, which all other things require for

> their existence and well-being; and whatever we believe regarding the divine Being.

And :

> So, one day, when I was exceedingly wearied with resisting its importunity, in the very conflict of my thoughts, that of which I had despaired offered itself.

Anselm refers to 'a single argument' which would require no other 'proof' but one that is somehow different from the kind of rational proofs he had previously constructed in the *Monologion*. This time, he says:

> I have written the following treatise, in the person of one who strives to lift his mind to the contemplation of God, and seeks to understand what he believes.

In this formulation, does Anselm in effect mean that 'understanding' what one believes is not providing a proof of that belief, if 'proof' is taken to mean the kind of argument he had already offered in the *Monologion*? Yet can a 'proof' be 'an argument which is not weak, but sufficiently cogent' when addressed to a Catholic rather than to 'a fool' – a fool who says in his heart that there is no God.

In this case, surely Anselm in his later reply is explicitly conceding that Gaunilo has shown that the 'proof' offered by Anselm was logically invalid. Yet Anselm himself insisted that the *Proslogion* should not henceforth be copied or circulated without both Gaunilo's objection and his own response being included with the *Proslogion*. Given also that we otherwise know nothing at all about 'Gaunilo' the suspicion may even arise that Anselm wrote both texts himself, perhaps in order to clarify a crucial difference, as in some of his other treatises explicitly composed as dialogues.

It is finally time to try to read Anselm himself. However, Anselm's own text of the *Proslogion* may now come as something of a surprise after those various 'logical' versions of the 'ontological argument' quoted earlier. It is time for some close reading. Perhaps more as a literary critic than as a philosopher.

actually reading Anselm

The crucial passages which are normally taken to constitute 'the ontological argument' are in chapters 2 and 3 of the *Proslogion*. However, the function of chapter 1 is often not much examined, which is where I want to begin. In my initial comments I use the term 'speaker' and also sometimes differentiate between single and double quotation marks for reasons I hope will become clear, with double indicating direct address. Deciding when and

which marks to use partly indicates the issues I want to highlight. Numerous phrases in Anselm's text are direct quotations taken mainly from the Psalms (references are given in square brackets), so we can sometimes regard the speaker or 'I' in these texts as (also) whoever speaks in those Psalms. I mainly quote the easily available English translation by Sidney Deane (1903), but with my own modifications and sometimes with the Latin text, italicised, in brackets. I use the Vulgate numbering of the Psalms.

After the prologue or proemium, quoted earlier, there is an 'exhortation' which is commonly passed over as if it were merely an extension of the preliminaries, a kind of opening prayer and not part of the argument. It begins with the writer addressing and exhorting someone – who, it seems, is himself:

> Chapter 1 : Exhortation of the mind to the contemplation of God.
> Well now, little man! flee, for a little while, your preoccupations; hide yourself, for a time, from your disturbing thoughts. Cast aside, now, your burdensome cares, and put away your toilsome business. Yield room for some little time to God; and rest for a little time in him. Enter the inner chamber of your mind; shut out everything except God, and whatever can aid you in seeking him; close your door and seek him. Speak now, my whole heart! speak now to God, saying: "I seek your face; your face, my Lord, will I seek." (Psalm 26. 8)

In using that phrase from the 26th Psalm the text switches the form of address, from addressing himself as "you" to addressing God: "your face, my Lord" ('*quaero vultum tuum; vultum tuum, domine, requiro.*').

The text, now speaking in the first person as 'I', continues to use "you" in the next passage to address "God" in the second person:

> And come you (*tu*) now, O Lord my God, teach my heart where and how it may seek you, where and how it may find you. (*Eia nunc ergo tu, Domine Deus meus, doce cor meum ubi et quomodo quaerat ubi et quomodo te inveniat*).

Latin does not normally deploy a separate term for the first-person singular, which is incorporated into the form of the verb. Here the second person is made explicit in the '*tu*' (vocative) and '*te*' (object or accusative) forms.

But then, almost immediately, the issue arises as to how "you" can be addressed if that 'you' is not 'here' to hear the speaker: "Lord, if you are not here, where shall I seek you, being absent?" The phrase 'if you are not here' (*si hoc non es*) introduces a significant motif of presence and absence. But this rather odd question tends to slide past the reader as a merely rhetorical question, which is immediately countered by the notion that this "you" is 'everywhere' – which implicitly explains how the 'you' can be addressed at all, wherever the 'I' is located.

> But if you are everywhere, why do I not see you present? (*Si autem ubique es, cur non video praesentem?*) Truly you dwell in unapproachable light. But where is unapproachable light? Or how shall I come to it? Or who shall lead to that light and into it, that I may see you in it? Again, by what marks, under what form, shall I seek you (*qua facie te quaeram*)? I have never seen you, O Lord, my God; I do not know your face.

Now the text switches to the third person, though 'this man' and 'your servant' are clearly to be identified with the first-person speaker:

> What shall he do, O most high Lord, what shall this man do, an exile far from you? What shall your servant do**,** anxious in his love of you, and 'cast out afar from your face' [Ps 50. 13]? He pants to see you, and your face is too far from him. He longs to come to you, and your dwelling-place is inaccessible. He is eager to find you, and knows not your place. He desires to seek you, and does not know your face. Lord, you are my God, and you are my Lord, and never have I seen you. It is you that has made me, and has made me anew, and has bestowed upon me all the blessing I enjoy; and not yet do I know you. Finally, I was created to see you, and not yet have I done that for which I was made.

Anxious questions are now raised about the condition of 'Man' in general and what 'he', humankind, has lost from 'his', Adam's, actions, so that 'we' all suffer thanks to what 'he', Adam, did.

The opening ambiguous conflation of third-person agents is then resolved into an explicit distinction between 'he' (Adam) and 'we', a first-person plural which clearly includes the speaker:

> O wretched lot of man, when he has lost that for which he was made! O hard and terrible fate! Alas, what has he lost, and what has he found? What has departed, and what remains? He has lost the blessedness for which he was made, and has found the misery for which he was not made. That has departed without which nothing is happy, and that remains which, in itself, is only miserable. Man once did eat the bread of angels, for which he hungers now; he eats now the bread of sorrows, of which he knew not then. Alas! for the mourning of all mankind, for the universal lamentation of the sons of Hades! He choked with satiety, we sigh with hunger. He abounded, we beg. He possessed happiness, and miserably forsook his possession; we suffer want in unhappiness, and feel a miserable longing, and alas! we remain empty. Why did he not keep for us, when he could so easily, that whose lack we should feel so heavily? Why did he shut us away from the light, and cover us over with darkness? With what purpose did he rob us of life, and inflict death upon us? Wretches that we are, whence have we been driven out;

whither are we driven on? Whence hurled? Whither consigned to ruin? From a native country into exile, from the vision of God into our present blindness, from the joy of immortality into the bitterness and horror of death. Miserable exchange of how great a good, for how great an evil! Heavy loss, heavy grief, heavy all our fate!

The text now reverts to the first-person, but with no explicit addressee, though the implicit hearer or listener to whom the questions are addressed could be either the speaker himself or the Lord, while 'God' is referred to in the third-person.

But alas! wretched that I am, one of the sons of Eve, far removed from God! What have I undertaken? What have I accomplished? Whither was I striving? How far have I come? To what did I aspire? Amid what thoughts am I sighing? I sought blessings, and lo! confusion. I strove toward God, and I stumbled on myself. I sought calm in privacy, and I found tribulation and grief, in my inmost thoughts. I wished to smile in the joy of my mind, and I am compelled to frown by the sorrow of my heart. Gladness was hoped for, and lo! a source of frequent sighs!

Now there is again a direct address to "you, Lord" with an appeal made in the first-person plural, 'we', on behalf of 'us' collectively:

And you too, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord, do you forget us; how long do you turn your face from us? When will you look upon us, and hear us? When will you enlighten our eyes, and show us your face? [Ps 6.4; Ps 12. 1-4; Ps 79. 4, 8] When will you restore yourself to us? Look upon us, Lord; hear us, enlighten us, reveal yourself to us. Restore yourself to us, that it may be well with us – yourself, without whom it is so ill with us. Pity our toilings and strivings toward you since we can do nothing without you. You invite us; do you help us (*adjuva nos*).

From the plural 'us' the text segues again into the first-person singular 'I', addressing "Lord" in the vocative, now more explicitly on behalf of the 'I' who returns as the same speaker as before:

I beseech you, O Lord, that I may not lose hope in sighs, but may breathe anew in hope. Lord, my heart is made bitter by its desolation; sweeten you it, I beseech you, with your consolation. Lord, in hunger I began to seek you; I beseech you that I may not cease to hunger for you. In hunger I have come to you; let me not go unfed. I have come in poverty to the rich, in misery to the compassionate; let me not return empty and despised. And if, before I eat, I sigh [*Job* 3. 24], grant, even after sighs, that which I may eat. Lord, I am bowed down and can only

> look downward; raise me up that I may look upward. My iniquities have gone over my head; they overwhelm me; and, like a heavy load, they weigh me down [*Ps* 37. 5]. Free me from them; unburden me, that the pit of iniquities may not close over me. [*Ps* 68. 16] Be it mine to look up to thy light, even from afar, even from the depths. Teach me to seek you, and reveal yourself to me, when I seek you, for I cannot seek you, except you teach me, nor find you, except you reveal yourself. Let me seek you in longing, let me long for you in seeking; let me find you in love, and love you in finding.

The text continues as a direct address to "Lord", now clearly conceived as indeed present. The Lord has 'created' in 'me' this "your image". Yet the 'I' is still seeking, from afar, though the Lord is present and addressed as "you":

> Lord, I acknowledge and I thank you that you have created me in this your image, in order that I may be mindful of you, may conceive of you, and love you; but that image has been so consumed and wasted away by vices, and obscured by the smoke of wrong-doing, that it cannot achieve that for which it was made, except you renew it, and create it anew. I do not endeavor, O Lord, to penetrate your sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding (*intellectum*) with that; but I long to understand (*intelligere*) in some degree, your truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe, that unless I believed, I should not understand.

This final formula claims to seek 'understanding' or perhaps 'intelligibility' and declares that 'I' now believe (*credo*) that without believing I do not understand. These last two sentences should be read in the Latin, and incorporate variations on phrases from Saint Augustine, with a final allusion to *Isaiah,* 7. 9 (*Si non credideritis, non permanebitis* - if I would not believe I would not survive):

> *Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam. Nam et hoc credo: quia nisi credidero, non intelligam.*

We are a very long way indeed from symbolic logic.

you are

I have not commented on the deliberate artifice of Anselm's writing, his stylistic preferences for assonance and balance, repetiton and variation, though Deane's English translation has some flavour of Anselm's rhetorical devices. It is worth noting that Anselm claims to have written his texts at

the request and for the benfit of his brother monks. They would have read these texts, perhaps sometimes aloud in the chapter house as communications from Anselm himself direct to the community at large, even in his actual presence. And they could themselves individually read this text, speaking these words in its constantly shifting but primarily first-person mode. So to identify the 'speaker' with Anselm is correct and yet not the whole story. This is in part a script for a kind of communal performance as well as a personal utterance or confessional prayer. Remember that Anselm was regarded as highly unusual in being able to read silently to himself.

Only after having at length exhorted himself into a devotional frame of mind and feeling, and provided his readers with a script to do the same themselves, Anselm finally moves to what is normally regarded as 'the argument' in chapter 2. The chapter heading is in the third-person, stating that 'truly God is' but the text is still initially addressed, in the vocative, to "Lord", "*Domine*":

> Chapter 2 : Truly there is a God (*Quod vere sit Deus*).
> And so, Lord, do you, who gives understanding to faith, give me, so far as you know it to be good for me, to understand that you are as we believe; and that you are that which we believe.
> (*Ergo, Domine, qui das fidei intellectum, da mihi, ut, quantum scis expedire, intelligam, quia es sicut credimus, et hoc es quod credimus.*)

Only then comes the first use of the core phrase which was to shape the whole later philosophical discussion of the so-called 'ontological proof':

> And indeed, we believe that *you are that than which nothing greater can be conceived.*
> (*Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit.*)

Crucially, this first appearance of the famous phrase clearly occurs in the vocative form, as part of a second-person address: "you are…" (*te esse*).

Pause for a moment and re-read the phrase I have italicised in the English translation. The very odd *te esse aliquid* is ignored in some commentaries and distorted in most translations.

Immediately then, as with the earlier question about a 'you' not being 'present', a problem or question is raised by quoting directly from Psalm 13. 1 :

> Or is there no such nature, since 'the fool has said in his heart, there is no God'?
> (*An ergo non est aliqua talis natura, quia 'dixit insipiens in corde suo: non est Deus'* ?)

The Fool uses a third-person statement: 'there is no God', *non est Deus*. Not surprisingly. It would, after all, be very peculiar indeed for the Fool to respond in the second-person form of address: 'the fool has said in his heart: "you are not God".' But again the significance of this is rarely registered by commentators, even by Aquinas.

What is at work here is a very strange logic. The earlier question had asked: "*Domine, si hoc non es, ubi te quaeram absentem*?" – "Lord, if you art not here, where shall I seek you, being absent?" Think for a moment about the oddity of that remark. Does it make sense to ask a question addressed to "you" which begins "If you are not here . . ". Recall the old class-room joke: "Anyone who is not present today please raise your hand." But in the case of God it would be a strange joke indeed since God is supposed to be everywhere.

It would be even more peculiar for the Fool to have said 'in his heart': "*you* do not exist". But if there is no such "you", and if the Fool is correct and 'there is no God', then who is being addressed, whether present or absent?

As the the text continues, the syntax is again worth noting. The core phrase used earlier is no longer addressed to a "you" who 'are that than which nothing greater can be conceived' but is now, in a very awkward syntax, referred to as 'this about which I say' : '[something] than which nothing greater can be conceived'. In Latin: *hoc ipsum quod dico aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest.* The Latin phrase 'ipsum quod dico' is not entirely clear, since 'ipsum quod' could refer to a person or a thing, or perhaps even to the phrase itself. But clearly what was previously a second-person addressee is now a third-person object being talked *about*, not talked *to*.

Like most others, Deane's translation clouds this uncertain ambiguity by inserting the neutral term 'being':

> But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak – a being than which nothing greater can be conceived – understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his intellect; although he does not understand it to exist. For, it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists.
> (*Sed certe ipse idem insipiens, cum audit hoc ipsum quod dico: aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest, intelligit quod audit; et quod intelligit, in intellectu eius est, etiam si non intelligat illud esse. Aliud enim est rem esse in intellectu, alium intelligere rem esse.*)

However, to be addressing somebody, talking *to* someone, is a very different activity from talking *about* somebody, or something. And it might be regarded as distinctly odd to address a 'something' that is not a 'someone'. Like Churchill addressing a table (see later).

But that is not the issue which the text then considers. Instead, the text now offers a kind of analogy, one which I mentioned earlier:

> When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet performed it. But after he has made the painting, he both has it in his understanding, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it.

The comparison with a painter might at first seem appropriate, if the issue is a matter of understanding whether something exists in the mind and / or in reality, like an imagined painting compared with a completed one.

But would the analogy work if it were a matter of the painter actually addressing a human model posing for a portrait painting and saying something like: "Well, I can see you in my mind, but do you actually exist in front of me?" And how would it work if the painter were to say: "I understand that you are what's called a model, but do you exist?" It might partly make sense if a friend of the painter were to joke: "So you claim to have a 'model'. Yes, I know what that means, but does she exist?" And what if the painting was, after all, a portrait without a model, so that the portrait was indeed of somebody who did *not* exist, but was simply imagined?

In any case, seeing or imagining a model or even a painting of a model is not the same as hearing the word 'model', which is a matter of whether we understand *the word*, or mis-understand it, or have never heard the word before and don't understand it at all. A curious problem is actually being evaded by the comparison with the act of painting. We are being distracted from noticing that the speaker has switched from talking *to* that 'than which nothing greater can be conceived' to talking *about* that 'than which nothing greater can be conceived'.

I want to explore some further aspects of this crucial shift later, but let us for a moment continue with the text of the *Proslogion*.

> Hence, even the fool is convinced that something (*aliquid*) exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.
> (*Convincitur ergo etiam insipiens esse vel in intellectu aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest, quia hoc, cum audit, intelligit, et quidquid intelligitur, in intellectu est. Et certe id quo maius cogitari nequit, non potest esse in solo intellectu. Si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re; quod maius est.*)

It is this passage which most commentators single out as the crucial step. Since it sets up the following *reductio ad absurdum*:

> Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.
> (*Si ergo id quo maius cogitari non potest, est in solo intellectu: id ipsum quo maius cogitari non potest, est quo maius cogitari potest. Sed certe hoc esse non potest. Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re.*)

If you start from a premise which leads to a self-contradiction or to asserting two opposite propositions which cancel each other out, then your premise must (normally) be invalid and its contrary must be true. Therefore 'that, than which nothing greater can be conceived' cannot exist only in the intellect.

However, this form of the argument clearly lays Anselm open to precisely the critique offered by Gaunilo and others: that I can (to use Gaunilo's example) indeed conceive of the most wonderful island in the world, but so conceiving it, and even conceiving that it exists (or even painting it), is not the same as it actually existing, nor evidence that it does so. The painter may try to imagine a painting 'greater than which no painting could be imagined', but that doesn't mean that he or anyone else has painted it or ever will paint it.

Variations of this fairly obvious critique abound in the numerous dismissive responses to Anselm and, whether it can be judged effective or otherwise, it is the issue upon which most critics focus. I want to suggest a rather different emphasis.

contra-position

Let us continue carefully with Anselm's text. The following chapter offers, on my reading, an even more questionable move.

> Chapter 3 : God cannot be conceived not to exist.
> (*Quia non possit cogitari non esse.*)
> And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. There is, then, so truly a something than which nothing

greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist.
(*Quod utique sic vere est, ut nec cogitari possit non esse. Nam potest cogitari esse aliquid, quod non possit cogitari non esse; quod maius est quam quod non esse cogitari potest. Quare si id quo maius nequit cogitari, potest cogitari non esse: id ipsum quo maius cogitari nequit, non est id quo maius cogitari nequit; quod convenire non potest. Sic ergo vere est aliquid quo maius cogitari non potest, ut nec cogitari possit non esse.*)

There is some disagreement among commentators as to whether this chapter constitutes an extension or elaboration of the previous argument, or a distinct second argument for the existence of God, or a consideration as to the properties or characteristics of God. In any case, at the very end of the argument the text again switches back to a second-person address:

> And this being you are, O Lord, our God. (*Et hoc es tu, Domine Deus noster.*)

Anselm may be persuasive, or otherwise, in claiming that he has clinched his case by appealing to this second apparent *reductio ad absurdum* and the apparent contradiction he posits. But there would have been an even greater peculiarity if he had concluded by saying instead: "This being who cannot be conceived to exist is you, my Lord." I might, perhaps, 'understand' such a remark (I know what the words mean) but it surely could not be *addressed* to anyone.

To do so would involve what Bernard Lonergan once called a 'contra-position': a statement which undercuts itself by the very fact that it is uttered. What Anselm is perhaps trying to offer is a kind of positive opposite of a contra-position: a statement which proves itself by the very fact that it is uttered.

Yet even the statement 'I am here' need not entail any actual presence or existence, if only because the statement can exist simply as a written sentence, un-read by anyone, or it may be a recorded utterance within a radio play, a remark by an artificial intelligence, or an announcement by the dramatised ghostly father of Hamlet. Or it may be something we imagined as having been said. In which case it would not even qualify as a performative utterance. Perhaps like Descartes' *cogito.*

Concluding chapter 3 of the *Proslogion,* Anselm continues the argument, now again explicitly in the second-person vocative, as he addresses "You", "Lord", "my God", and in effect tells God :

> So truly, therefore, do you exist, O Lord, my God, that you can not be conceived not to exist; and rightly so.
> (*Sic ergo vere es, Domine, Deus meus, ut nec cogitari possis non esse. Et merito.*)

> For, if a mind could conceive of a being better than you, the creature would rise above the Creator; and this is most absurd. And, indeed, whatever else there is, except you alone, can be conceived not to exist. To you alone, therefore, it belongs to exist more truly than all other beings, and hence in a higher degree than all others. For, whatever else exists does not exist so truly, and hence in a lesser degree it belongs to it to exist. Why, then, has the fool said in his heart, there is no God [*Ps.* 13. 1], since it is so evident, to a rational mind, that you do exist in the highest degree of all? Why, except that he is dull and a fool?

I somewhat doubt if the Lord was flattered by that remark. But I also suspect that the fool could be heard to mutter, adapting Galileo: "But you still don't exist".

addressing

I want to draw breath and step back from this close reading of the text and consider what I have indicated about Anselm's 'ontological' argument. First, recall the description given by Eadmer of the process which Anselm claims had led to his insight. It is clear from that description, which presumably derives from Anselm himself, that during the course of the several days during which he racked his brains to arrive at the elusive formulation of a proof which he constantly sensed was just beyond his grasp, he would have spent much of the time not 'doing philosophy' but praying to the very God whose nature and existence he was trying to understand.

Part of the process would have been addressing God, asking for help in the process of thinking, pleading for divine illumination, trying out alternative formulations in the very 'presence' of God, and so on. Anselm specifically indicates that this protracted process of frustrated intellectual search intermittently occurred during the liturgical prayers themselves, and he even recounts the fear that the devil might be thereby tempting him, as the obverse of his hope or expectation that God would assist him. In other words, Anselm was throughout *addressing* "God" – and the coining of the phrase "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" was in effect almost finding a new 'name' by which to address God.

It seems wholly plausible that the original insight which suddenly struck Anselm actually took the form of the vocative address: "*You*, Lord, are that than which nothing greater can be conceived." As an illumination from God himself, that very second-person address was itself, in an odd kind of way, addressed *by God to* Anselm. Providing him with the very formulation that he had been seeking was God's answer to his prayers. It is God's voice which in effect tells Anselm that it is appropriate to *address* God as "*you who are* that than which nothing greater can be conceived."

But when trying to reconstruct the apparently self-sustaining implication of that gnomic utterance Anselm himself seems later to have attempted to re-formulate the insight in the third-person mode: '*God is* that than which nothing greater can be conceived', or even more impersonally: 'there is something than which nothing greater can be conceived'. It is from this third-person version that the logical conundra and complications arise.

The exact syntax of the apparently cumbersome negative or apophatic form is needed in order to construct the logical *reductio ad absurdum* argument, so that 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' is preferred to the more obvious and simpler formulation: 'the greatest which can be conceived'. That version would not justify the *reductio ad absurdum* of the overall argument and would in any case immediately raise the awkward question 'the greatest what?'

Without a continuing implicit reliance upon the "you" version, the 'it' version would not have served Anselm's purpose at all, since the formal *reductio* of the third-person 'it' version could apply to something which is not a 'person', whereas the implication of addressing "God" as a person is required for the argument to have the force that Anselm intends: that the 'something' is indeed what we believe "God" to be, even though what is then required is a further elaboration of the properties of this 'God'.

The crucial function of the opening address to "God" in the extended exhortatory rhetoric of the proemium and chapter 1 is to construct the 'God' who appears in the following argument as the kind of thing which (that is, a person who) can be addressed, and indeed who can address Anselm (as the "you" who is 'I'). The God who figures in the ontological argument may be referred to as an impersonal *aliquid* but the argument is, by a persistent slippage, actually about an *aliquis* – not a something 'than which nothing greater can be conceived' but a you, a someone "than which nothing greater can be conceived".

Consider the following alternative formulation which would leave open what kind of a thing the subject of the argument is: 'cosmog is that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. We don't know what the meaning or possible reference of the unknown word 'cosmog' is. In its application to (a or the?) 'cosmog' we don't therefore know in what sense the word 'greater' might apply. Nevertheless, if we allow that we 'understand' what the phrase 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' means, we can still proceed with the formal argument, the same *reductio ad absurdum*: 'cosmog' would be 'greater' if cosmog existed in reality as well as in the mind, and therefore if cosmog does not exist '*in re*' it would not be 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' and therefore cosmog must exist. Whatever it, or cosmog, is.

Another variation might be: 'this present is that than which nothing greater can be conceived and a present which exists is greater than a present which doesn't…' – and so on. Yet in English whether 'this present'

indicates a gift I am about to give or the temporal moment of the 'now' leaves the argument formally valid but wholly vacuous.

In other words, without a prior 'understanding' of what is intended as the kind of being that 'God' is, Anselm's argument, while valid in purely logical terms (for some commentators), remains empty of any persuasion that the "God" of chapter 1 is the 'God' of chapter 2. Or rather, that the *aliquid* of chapter 2 meets the expectations aroused by the address in chapter 1. Unless the persuasive power of that complex opening exhortation variously addressed to himself, to the reader, and to "God", has already had its intended effect upon the reader, including the 'I' of Anselm himself.

Clearly, however, the "you" form of the argument has no evidential force by itself. That I can address: "That than which nothing greater can be conceived" cannot itself act as the opening move in the *reductio ad absurdum* argument which Anselm needed to construct.

Yet in a compelling way the original vocative form does seem to have effectively persuaded Anselm that it could indeed act as the irrefutable 'single argument' he had been searching for. And not only because that was the mode in which the phrase had actually occurred to him.

It is the function of chapter 1 to re-create for his reader, including himself as his own reader, the experience that will lead to that 'understanding'. What the text does is to bring together the "you" addressed in prayer and the God who, it is argued, has indeed the various metaphysical attributes which the text as a whole then goes on to elaborate. In other words, Anselm's own vocative version of the 'ontological proof' combines in a single phrase the personal Yahweh or Father of the Old and New Testament narratives and the impersonal deity of the philosophical tradition. Which means that the argument was not a coherent single illuminating insight, however it may have presented itself as such. Though one might bend grammar and syntax by saying: "*you is* that than which nothing greater can be conceived."

vocative mode

To recap and clarify: in trying to arrive at the elusive 'single argument' he was searching for, Anselm would have had to consider how he could conceive of 'God' at all. To recognise or acknowledge that he could not intelligibly or coherently conceive of God would have rendered the pursuit of the desired argument impossible: God would indeed have been 'greater than can be conceived', as in the apophatic theological tradition. But the insight that this formulation could be replaced by "you are" "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" permitted Anselm to then further construct a formal *reductio ad absurdum* argument which would not have been possible using the traditional apophatic formulation that God could not be conceived. However, once he had satisfactorily formulated the *reductio ad absurdum* as a 'proof' of the very existence of God, it would then be logically

possible (in *Proslogion* chapter 15) to further allow that God was in any case 'greater than can be conceived'. To arrive at that position, it was necessary to take the first step, which was the vocative form of the premise: "*you are* that than which nothing greater can be conceived."

I am not suggesting that the vocative mode of Anselm's argument is thereby rendered more, or less, valid than in the more familiar quasi-syllogistic third-person reformulation of it, but rather exploring how or why Anselm was so convinced that he had, after the long frustrating process of seeking the illumination which he describes, actually arrived at a compelling insight, yet one the elusive grounds for which have in turn frustrated many subsequent readers of his argument. We might ourselves find, perhaps like Anselm himself, that we oscillate between both grasping the persuasive force of the formulation and also registering the elusive emptiness of the argument. In part, I suggest, this is precisely because the *Proslogion* combines, conflates, or confuses the second-person and third-person versions of the argument.

When Anselm thinks: "you are: something than which nothing greater can be thought" this obviously, if implicitly, takes it for granted that 'you are something' to begin with, since otherwise the act of addressing 'you' would be imaginary and void of existential content. Like addressing a non-existent model and asking her or him to pose for a portrait. Yet the point of the address in this form is not to prove existence, but to clarify or to establish that, as the text explicitly says: "you exist *as we believe*, and that you are *what we believe you to be*". The "You" in this address is not so much a concept as an addressee and the purpose of this formulation is to claim that the belief we have of 'God' as existing must apply to the "You" who is being addressed. This is clearly a form of circular argument, but perhaps not simply tautological: "you are what we believe you to be" is not quite the same as "you are what you are."

In that respect, Anselm's 'belief' is 'seeking understanding'. In order to address someone you have to believe that they exist. But on the basis of that belief one might imagine or conceive the addressee to be various kinds of being. The King whom you are addressing may be most un-kingly, the Queen you are addressing may be beautiful or otherwise, the Pope you are addressing may be wise and saintly, or otherwise. But the "God" you are addressing in order to be the 'God' in whom you believe must, for Anselm, be all-powerful, all-wise, all-knowing, and so on. That divine "You" is 'present in my mind' not primarily as a concept but fundamentally as an addressee 'in my heart'. Could anybody 'believe in the heart' the conceptual conclusion to a sequence of formulations in symbolic logic?

Moreover, Anselm is decidedly not postulating the kind of 'clear and distinct idea' which Descartes was later to claim to have conceived, however indebted or otherwise Descartes may have been to Anselm's own argument. It is not for Anselm a matter of trying to get clear what the concept of God is, in the same way that we might try to get clear what the

concept of a cat is, but rather constructing a situation in which Anselm has a justified confidence in addressing the God in whom he believes. Because otherwise his whole life-time of praying to "God" would be, in an almost literal sense, un-thinkable. Though, as he says, Anselm has never seen God face-to-face, as he might never have met Queen Matilda or Abbot Hugh face-to-face, yet nevertheless he has confidence in addressing Queen or Abbot in a letter to them as really existing. He seeks a confirmation of a similar affirmation of his belief that his addressee "God" exists.

It is then understandable why Anselm, in replying to Gaunilo, should begin from the position that Gaunilo as a monk who also practised praying on a daily basis must already have 'in his mind' the God whom he has addressed in that prayer. Anselm is not relying upon an assumption that Gaunilo would endorse a particular doctrinal statement or a definite philosophical proposition about the nature and existence of the divine, but rather upon the confidence that any monk like Anselm himself could not have practised a life-time of prayer without some compelling awareness of the God to whom such prayers were directed. This is consonant with the point often made, that the *Proslogion* is composed in part of fervent prayers as well as apparently philosophical arguments. Yet for a non-believing reader a prayer addressed to a silent God, however vividly conceived, is even less persuasive than an invalid syllogism. Unless, of course, the first step the 'Fool' can be persuaded to take is to address "God" in prayer.

letters

If we now situate the "you" version of Anselm's argument in the context of his other writings it might be easier to understand why for Anselm the second-person address was an integral part of the insight he was claiming to encapsulate in the *Proslogion*. Over half the texts collected in Schmitt's standard six-volume edition of Anselm's works are letters. I use Schmitt's numbering of them. Almost necessarily, though not absolutely so, a letter is addressed to somebody who is absent. In writing his numerous letters Anselm was in an obvious sense conjuring up the presence of an addressee who was absent, and this is palpably part of his own sense of what it means to write a letter.

Consider for example the opening of Letter 51, 'To the monks Herluin, Gundulf, and Maurice' (Schmitt III, p. 164, my translation):

> If you well remember your delight at how I always longed to see you when you were present, you will know well enough how much I long to hear from you now that you are absent.

A familiar epistolatory formula. But Anselm's longing for an absent recipient can almost be transformed, by the very act of writing a letter, into a mutual presence, at least 'in the mind' or 'heart'. Here is Letter 4, written

around 1071 to Gundulf, with some phrases I have italicised which might be read as closely echoing Anselm's formulations in the *Proslogion* (Schmitt III, p. 104):

> Whenever I intend to write to you, soul most beloved of my soul, whenever I intend to write to you, I am uncertain as to how best I should begin to address you. For whatever I feel about you is sweet and joyful to my heart; whatever I wish for you, that is *the best my mind can conceive*. For *I see you as such a person that I must love*, as you know I do; I hear of you as the sort of person I must long for, as God knows I do. So it is that that *wherever you go, my love follows after you; and wherever I may stay, my longing for you enfolds you*. . . How could I erase you? Since you are *imprinted on my heart like a waxen seal* how could you be excised from my memory? Besides, why, as I hear, do you complain so sadly that you never see my letters, and why do you beg me so lovingly that you may often receive them, *when you have my very thoughts with you all the time*? Even *when you are silent I know you love me;* and when I am silent you know that I love you. . . Since we are aware that *we are together in each other's awareness of each other,* therefore it only remains for us to tell each other about our affairs so that we may either rejoice together or be concerned about each other.

This sense of being able to conjure up the absent one, as a 'soul' present in the mind and in one's heart, wherever the 'I' or 'you' may be, applies not only to someone physically distant but also to the dead:

> For the late Osbern, my sweetest friend, I ask you and all my friends to pray, with the fewest words I know yet with as much fervour as I can. *Wherever Osbern is, his soul is my soul.* May I therefore while living receive for him what I can hope for when dead from my friends, so that they will be released from such obligation to me when I die.

The italicised phrase here might seem today simply a kind of conceit or even cliché, but Anselm's framework for understanding and formulating such relationships partly depends upon the assumed notion of a non-corporeal spirit, the 'soul' as separable from the body, not only in death but perhaps as able to be 'present' now without the physical presence of the body. This belief also underpins his fundamental argument about the very nature of God and, in his other treatises, the notion that non-corporeal intelligent beings such as angels and devils can and do exist.

The motif of absence and presence which runs through Anselm's early correspondence is deeply shaped by such notions of the 'soul' and of the relations between 'souls'. Here is Letter 41 'To the monk Gundulf' (Schmitt, III, p. 152, my italics):

> Both my Gundulf and your Anselm testify that neither you nor I ever need to declare our mutual affection to each other by exchanging letters. *Since your soul and my soul never suffer to be absent from each other but are continuously involved together, nothing of ourselves is absent from the other except that we are not bodily present to each other.* But why do I describe my love to you in a written note when you carefully retain the real image of that love in the ark of your heart? For what is your love towards me but the image of my love towards you? I know that your wish invites me to write something to you because of our bodily absence, but since *we are known to each other by the very presence of our souls* I don't know what to say to you except that God will do for you what he knows will please himself and be good for you. Farewell.

Anselm frequently seems to be not simply expressing but actually creating or summoning up an intense love for his absent addressee. Much as he does in relation to God in the hortatory opening chapter of the *Proslogion*. This love, like the letter itself, is offered as a kind of gift to the absent addressee and loving letters in reply are expected as return gifts. Yet the gift of giving is a curious one and the terms in which Anselm describes or conjures up that loving relationship may strike a reader today as peculiarly exaggerated. Yet underpinning the vocabulary of gift and in particular the gift of one's 'self' is the perhaps even odder implicit notion of 'sharing' a soul.

How far Anselm himself might have taken literally this notion of soul-sharing it is impossible to say but it is not too remote from some of the emphases he places in his theological treatises upon the gift of 'grace', of the divine being or 'life' as actually shared by the human recipients of God's love, as a 'participation' in that life. Anselm thinks of this gift of love not so much as given but as shared: the love he sends remains with him, since love is a relationship, and also almost an entity, like 'grace'. It is this insight which arguably informs his extended theological discussion in the *Monologion* of the Holy Spirit as actually being the love-relationship between the Father and the Son.

In Anselm's letters there is often a peculiar conflation between presence and absence and perhaps a kind of implicit logic. In writing a letter to an absent friend Anselm has no reason to doubt the existence of that friend. Though there may be instances when we are writing to a friend whom we believe to be still alive but who is in fact already dead at the time of writing, Anselm in any case believed that there was also some form of after-life existence which was conceivable.

Similarly, in addressing a prayer to God Anselm has no doubt that the God who exists in his mind at that moment as an effect of that writing practice also exists independently of the act of writing. The move from this to the logical structure of the "you" version of the 'ontological proof' is a small step: a purely imaginary friend, who exists only in our mind or as the

imagined addressee of a letter, would be a less satisfactory friend than one who actually exists, however absent, or even already dead.

It might be too much to suggest that the addressee of a letter by Anselm is conceived as one person with two natures, that of an imagined *persona* and that of an actually existing human being. Yet it is clearly the case that on occasion one could indeed be addressing only a projected recipient and, however fervent or heartfelt the text of one's address might be, such rhetorical sincerity does not, of course, guarantee that the addressee has any other existence than in one's mind, on paper, or a wax tablet. Any more, incidentally, than my conceiving of a reader for this text guarantees the existence of one. Though if you are now reading it my supposition has been confirmed. Though I don't know that, or who, "you" are. One might add, anticipating somewhat, that today's widespread internet scams characteristically involve 'catfish' personae and rely upon people's propensity to project real existence and identity upon what may be only an entirely artificial persona.

This is not to say that Anselm does not deploy other kinds of argument, including the notion of the perfect being, or the attempt to argue on the basis of reason alone in the *Monologion*, or in the first part of *Cur Deus Homo*. Since Anselm explicitly attempts to deploy reason alone in these other instances, his attempt in the *Proslogion* is taken, perhaps in an unclear way even by Anselm himself and also by subsequent readers, to be similarly an attempt to construct a purely rational argument. Which it is, but the core premise is not a third-person proposition (God is X) but rather a second-person address (you are: that than which nothing greater can be thought). Which modifies the very basis of the logic. But may not necessarily invalidate it. And certainly suggests a range of other considerations.

persona

In the opening paragraph of the preface to the *Proslogion* Anselm writes that the *Monologion* had been written 'in the guise of someone who investigates things he does not know, by means of a process of silent reasoning within himself.' The Latin is: '*in persona alicuius*...' – 'in the persona of someone.' Anselm would have been aware of *persona* as the term used for the mask of an actor, signifying a particular kind of role, as well as its technical use in discussions of the Trinity. The preface ends by saying: 'I named the former work *Monologion*, that is, a soliloquy (*soliloquium*), and the latter, *Proslogion*, that is, an address (*alloquium*).' The writer of a letter is himself to a large extent constructed by and dramatised or impersonated in the writing process. We can almost overhear Anselm adopting the *persona* he wishes to embody in any particular letter, and we can in our own process of reading allow ourselves to construct, impersonate, or enact that *persona* to a greater or lesser extent, as well as imagining the implied addressee of the letter. That Anselm normally dictated his letters to a scribe reminds us that the writing

of letters could in any case involve a degree of dramatisation and of physically voiced performance, just as we now have to adopt an imagined authorial persona if we read these letters aloud to either an imagined or an actual audience. We might also remember that in the Christian liturgy the letters of Paul were frequently read aloud, as conveying the very voice of Paul himself.

The point also applies when the writing practice includes what one might call the ventriloquised reply of an intended addressee. The words attributed to one's interlocutor, in the postulated response of the recipient of a letter or the attributed reply of a debater in a text composed as a dialogue, constitute in effect the construction of a *persona* within a persona. The most familiar example of such ventriloquism for Anselm would have been the response of a divine interlocutor to whom one attributes words of comfort or rebuke, as in many of the Psalms, which Anselm and the whole monastic community would have recited every day, spoken or chanted in the choir, and which provide so many of the phrases deployed in the *Proslogion*. Anselm can freely adopt a *persona* of the Psalmist while the inspired words of the Psalms are regarded as those of God himself addressed to those who address Him in the words which He himself has provided.

Consider some more letters. In Letter 79 to the monk Maurice the complexity of the relation between presence, absence, and love, is almost directly reminiscent of expressing a love of God shaped by a desire actually to see 'face to face' yet, as in the *Proslogion*, unable to do so:

> Although the more I love you the more I want to have you with me, yet because I cannot have you I love you even more. For since I love you not for myself but for God and for yourself, I love you more because you show yourself to be such that those who have you with them find it more difficult to send away someone they love than find it easy to dismiss someone they have no regard for. Therefore I appeal to you as a brother and admonish you as a dearest son, because of the care and diligence which you are aware I have always had towards you, insofar as you advance more and more towards a good life, you should patiently bear with me our separation as long as our lord and father, the venerable Archbishop Lanfranc, commands it as a divine intention; lest your impatience diminishes the very qualities for which I love you most. For although I love you greatly and desire you to be close to me by living in our community with me, yet I desire even more that you commit yourself irrevocably to a good mode of life. Therefore, take most care that wherever you may be, you live in a way befitting a good man and a servant of God, and be confident that God will provide for you whatever is best for you.

In letter 10, to Adelaide, the daughter of King William I, Anselm responds to her request for him to send her a *florilegium* or selection of the Psalms for

her own devotions. He also included a number of prayers he had himself composed, and he commented (Schmitt, III, p. 113):

> After the 'Flowers of the Psalms' seven 'Prayers' have been added. Of these the first should not so much be called a 'Prayer' as a 'Meditation', in which the soul of the sinner briefly considers itself, in so considering it despises itself, in despising itself it humbles itself, in humbling itself it prompts itself by the terrors of the last judgement, and through this stuns itself into groans and tears. But in the prayers to Saint Stephen and Saint Mary Magdalen there are some matters which, if they are spoken of with the inmost heart when it is empty of all other matters, tend otherwise to open the heart to love. But in all seven I exhort you, as the servant and friend of your soul, even though you might do this better yourself, to consider most carefully with what humility and emotions of fear and love one should offer the sacrifice of prayer. Farewell in God.

At times, Anselm describes his prayers almost as a musician might comment on his compositions, or perhaps as a conductor might direct an opera singer. After Anselm included his newly composed prayers with his letters to various monks and friends who had requested them, his 'prayers and meditations' gradually became widely copied and imitated, almost creating a new devotional genre. Later, they were to be frequently printed alongside passages from Augustine's *Confessions*, often under the joint title *Soliloquies*.

prayer & persona

Just as a letter by Anselm to a distant monk involved the projection of the recipient *persona* 'in his heart' as an implicit or built-in aspect of the writing practice itself, so Anselm in his prayers constructs the projected *persona* of an absent addressee: God himself, or a particular Saint, conjuring them up by the way he addresses them and, quite often, by the responses which he ventriloquises on their behalf. It is part of the process of praying these written prayers, and perhaps of ourselves reading Anselm's prayers 'prayerfully', that we too may attempt to construct that saintly or divine addressee in our own minds and even in a tone of voice implicitly adopted in our quasi-performative utterances.

In his prayer to Christ Anselm speaks, as in the *Proslogion*, of not having met God face-to-face, again echoing Psalm 79. 4:

> Come now, Lord, appear to me and I will be consoled; show me your face and I shall be saved; show me your presence and I will have gained my desire; reveal your glory and my joy will be complete. My soul thirsts after you, as my flesh longs for you, my soul thirsts after God,

> the living source, when will I come to appear before the very face of my God?

The prayer to Saint Peter reads very much like a letter:

> I do not feel that I have been heard properly, so with painful urgency I will repeat my story from the beginning, and repeat my pleading all over again. Before the doorkeeper of the kingdom of heaven, and the head of the apostles, I will show my faithful soul, my misery in the kingdom of sin, and my longing for the kingdom of heaven, and in this way will I call upon Peter, doorkeeper of heaven, first among the apostles: 'So look, merciful Peter, I show you my soul…'

Again there is an oscillation between an apparent third-person reference and a direct second-person addressee. The act of praying these compositions was intended to involve an intense engagement, an emotional enactment.

Here are Anselm's instructions in the opening of his *Meditation on Human Redemption* which are not only about how to read God's words in the Scriptures but implicitly how to read Anselm's own prayerful texts:

> Taste the goodness of your Redeemer, be on fire with a love for your saviour. Chew the honeycomb of his words, suck their flavour which is sweeter than sap, swallow their wholesome sweetness. Chew by thinking, suck by understanding, swallow by loving and rejoicing. Be glad to chew, be thankful to suck, rejoice to swallow.

*

A further aspect of the 'ontological argument' can be illustrated from Anselm's letters. In writing to his fellow monks, he addressed them as brothers or friends or as their spiritual adviser. But Anselm also wrote letters to such recipients as King Henry, Queen Matilda, Pope Pascal, and various Abbots and Archbishops. In each case, he addresses somebody who is physically absent but present 'in his mind', as the person from whom he is seeking a reply or response. But his tone and the construction of his own *persona* and that of his addressee is inflected by the social and ecclesiastical status of his intended recipient. Consider the titular address of the letter and the terms of deference with which he addresses the Princess Adelaide:

> *Brother Anselm, to the venerable lady of royal nobility but nobler in her virtuous life, Adelaide, may your temporal nobility be so adorned with the ornaments of virtue that it will merit the eternal happiness of being united with the King of Kings:.* As for the 'florilegium of the Psalms' that your highness, dear to me in God, deigned to require of me, faithful humility could not have fulfilled

> it for you more speedily or any better, since our obedience followed your command devotedly, as much as the command itself proceeded from holy devotion. . . I only ask that your rich nobility not despise the inadequate and lowly gift which our wretched poverty sends you. For although it is not encrusted with gold and precious stones, it is certainly wholly made up of charitable fidelity and offered with faithful charity.

There is an implicit logic in this recognition of high social status, unavoidable in a hierarchical feudal society. When, in his prayers or in the *Proslogion*, Anselm is addressing God he is consciously addressing somebody immeasurably 'greater' than Kings or Popes, someone indeed 'than whom nobody greater can be thought'. We can almost ventriloquise Anselm's thinking: 'When I address myself to Queen Matilda or King Henry I am aware of their greatness in comparison with this wretched little man that I am. But if they did not exist they would not be as great as I conceive them to be, nor even greater than I am. Whereas God when I address him is indeed someone greater than which no-one else can be conceived, not only because I can conceive him as existing but also because I can conceive him as necessarily existing.'

One implication of any such 'necessarily' would be that though it is possible to make a mistake and address as "Pope" somebody who is not a Pope but an anti-Pope, or address as "King" somebody who is not Royal, and it would also matter if I was addressing a real person who happens to be dead, in the case of "God" it would be quite unthinkably odd to be addressing the 'wrong' God, especially if my idea of God is in accordance with the arguments in the whole *Proslogion*, and because, according to the *Monologion,* God cannot but be present, always, everywhere.

Moreover, as we have seen in discussing Eadmer's writings a while ago, Anselm was far from sure as to his own status, or even secure in his identity. One letter to Lanfranc is affectionately but almost painfully convoluted in its intertwined playing with forms of address and terms of logic, indicating the complexity of Anselm's not knowing quite what *persona* to adopt, though he is clear as to that of his addressee (Letter 57 Schmitt III, p. 171):

> *To his Lord and father, the Reverend Archbishop Lanfranc: Brother Anselm, in everything totally his.*
> As the prophet Zechariah repeats in almost every verse, as confirming his authority as a prophet, 'thus said the Lord', so, to make it clear who is speaking to whom and in what capacity, it pleases me that so often the letters I send to your paternal Highness have the clear heading: "Lord and father" and "in all things totally his". I do not say that I know how to produce a virtual likeness but I have engraved a cypress tree in my mind so that whatever I put forward as my opening greeting may appear expressed in the finished version. Since therefore I so often

> inscribe this form of address to you, asking I complain and complaining I enquire, why you never write back to me, but address some "Lord and father" of yours, whom I do not recognise, identified by just his first initial. But if it is your servant and son you are writing to, why do you try to subvert by reciprocal opposition, what you cannot undermine by direct negation? Therefore I pray that whenever I receive a letter from Your Grace either I can see to whom you are writing or not see to whom you are not writing.

We could link this to Anselm's own ambivalence as to his status, both personally and in relation to the respective functions of clergy and state, Archbishop and King, including the problematic comparative greatness of kings and archbishops, emperors and popes. Which also raises the issue of temporary 'successions', whereby different occupants of a particular role might have the same formal status but exhibit a quite different persona. Yet if there is a good and a better there must be a conceivable best, if great and greater there must be greatest – leading to the notion of an intrinsic greatest who is also permanently and necessarily so. A true Lord and eternal King. As distinct from all those passing kings and popes who briefly and 'successively' occupy thrones and fulfil offices, there is surely someone who is always there, here, and everywhere, every time, now. Necessarily.

greater

We can now return to the formulation of what has so often been called 'the ontological proof', perhaps with a clearer sense of what 'addressing' an 'absent' person meant for Anselm. The first point is that in praying, Anselm could experience himself as addressing someone who was very palpably present to him 'in his mind', and there is a progression one can trace from Anselm addressing with varyingly appropriate terms of greeting, endearment, respect, and humility, a hierarchy of his various addressees: a fellow monk, a fellow Abbot, a Bishop, the Archbishop of York, Queen Matilda, King Henry, Pope Pascal – each addressee being 'in his mind' in various senses 'greater' than others in that hierarchy of status and assumed excellence. The culminating point would be the divine itself, immeasurably and undeniably 'greater' than any other addressee, both present and absent, indeed beyond presence and absence. The divine addressee is thereby 'greater' than that which any can conceive.

However, there is a further twist in the implications of the formula 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' – however we translate the term here rendered as 'conceived'. If it were only a matter of my own capacity or incapacity to conceive of someone greater even than a Pope, that might be due to my inadequacy, or even my lack of experience in appropriate feudal circles. At this point a certain impersonality of the formulation is required: the phrase must mean 'that than which nothing

greater can be conceived – by anyone'. The implicit appeal is to the impossibility of any concept encapsulating 'greatness' even beyond that which is being conceptualised.

Yet the person who is being addressed is, in Anselm's mind, alone capable of conceiving things 'greater' than any one else could conceive. It is therefore only God himself who is able to judge whether 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' can indeed be conceived. It would require divine assistance for the 'wretched little man', as Anselm describes himself, to be able to reach even an apophatic conception of such greatness. Which is perhaps exactly what Anselm thought had happened at that moment of prayerful illumination: that God himself had given Anselm this formulation, even though it was one which only God could fully 'understand'. Indeed, God is the only person in a position to assess the validity of the proof of his own existence. But God doesn't need any such proof.

For Anselm the divine "You" whom 'I' address must exist, otherwise his whole life has been a hollow practice, above all the constant praying. In addressing "You" what 'I' therefore most want is not an answer to a conceptual problem, a proof of a proposition, but a response to my appeal. If I address to "You" the plea "answer me!" and there is no answer, then perhaps it is my fault and I must try harder. As Anselm does in the prayers which rhetorically work up his sense of guilt, horror, and sin. What is inconceivable is that there is in fact no addressee to offer any response or answer at all. Even when "You" doesn't answer and remains silent. But the "You" had spoken in that moment of revelation or insight. Chapter 1 of the *Proslogion* attempts a reconstruction of a state in which that moment can be partly or almost captured again, so that Anselm can again address "God" even in a now silent absence.

If I can address other people as "you", I can also address myself as "you". Anselm does so in many of his written prayers. *Proslogion* chapter 1 begins with such a self-address. And it is inconceivable that the 'you' whom I address in addressing myself does not exist. One might say that my 'soul' is the 'you' whom I address as 'I'. And I am always present to myself.

Descartes' basic '*cogito*' argument, 'I think, therefore I am', might be regarded as a reflexive self-address in a similar mode to Anselm's 'ontological proof', such that its primary premise is not the statement that 'I think', but the fact that I am telling myself: "you are thinking." If I ask myself the question "am I thinking?" the answer has to be "yes I am." In Latin anyway the nominative 'I' is already included within the verb '*cogito*'. A child who believes in Santa Claus addresses him, and it is a built-in premise of asking Santa Claus for presents that Santa Claus actually exists to be asked. And also that the child exists. Descartes' *cogito* is perhaps an even more direct rendition of the core of Anselm's 'ontological argument' than the commentary Descartes implicitly offered upon it.

There is a further assonance between the motif of absence and presence in the letters, the prayers, and Anselm's fundamental theological concepts

concerning both the divine and the human. In trying to understand what Anselm meant by his having a conception of God 'in his mind' we are drawn to consider such terms as 'mind', 'spirit', and 'soul'. For something to be both in Anselm's mind and in the 'mind of God' seems to imply that this shared something – like the love shared between Anselm and his fellow monks – must be itself non-physical or incorporeal, and it is basic to Anselm's argument about the very nature of God that being non-corporeal is undeniably 'greater' than being corporeal. Once it is conceded, or assumed, that non-corporeal spirits can exist, the way is open to adducing as attributes of a 'spirit' the exercise of capacities which would indeed be limited by corporeality: being everywhere and knowing everything, being outside time yet always present.

Without the concept of a non-corporeal spiritual being it is difficult to affirm the traditional attributes of the Christian God, let alone to make sense of the doctrine of the Trinity. Within the framework available to Anselm the distinction between the body and the mind was inextricably wound up with the notion of 'spirit'. Without some version of this linchpin concept of 'spirit' or 'soul' we too might have to rethink some of the categories we find most familiar. And perhaps one of the terms we would have to re-think is that of thinking itself.

self-evidence

I have so far considered some immediate contexts for Anselm's 'ontological argument', including how the *Proslogion* can be situated in his way of life as a monk. Some broader themes can now be explored, in a fairly tentative way, exploring or at least broaching a range of connected issues.

Consider for example the implications of another letter by Anselm. In 1077 Anselm sent the draft manuscript of the *Monologion* to Lanfranc, by then Archbishop of Canterbury, asking for his comments. It was explicit in the *Monologion* that Anselm proposed to validate Christian beliefs about God by the use of reason alone. We don't have Lanfranc's response, but clearly he expressed disquiet at Anselm's neglect of the established practice of citing Biblical texts and patristic authorities as the primary supports for a theological argument. Here is Anselm's tactful but firm reply (Letter 77, Schmitt III. p. 199):

> Concerning the matters which are dealt with in that little work, and which you advise with considerate and wise counsel should be very meticulously balanced in the mind and discussed with experts in the sacred texts, and when reason fails us should be buttressed by divine authority, all this I have done as best I could, both before and after your loving paternal admonition. It was my intention throughout the entire argumentation, whatever form it took, that in it I should never assert anything unless I saw that it could be strongly defended either by

> an appeal to canonical writings or the works of blessed Augustine. And now, however much I reconsider what I said, I cannot conceive myself as having stated anything other than such . . and indeed blessed Augustine in his book *De Trinitate* strongly argues these same points so that, discerning the same matters with my own limited reasoning, I might speak relying upon his authority. I say this not to defend anything I said to you but to show that I did not presume to state them on my own but adopted them from someone else. But whatever the case, that work awaits your judgement, to be either salvaged or on your authority.

Despite the somewhat disingenuous claims about Augustine, Anselm effectively declined Lanfranc's criticism and put into circulation a version of the *Monologion* which asserted its reliance solely upon reason. His initially preferred title for the treatise had been simply *meditatio de ratione fidei*. Anselm can be seen as here making two significant moves within the received traditions of Christian thinking.

One implication was that his argument would rely upon his own intellectual resources, his individual selection and validation of a starting point which he could regard and represent as in effect self-evident. Relying upon some such 'self-evident' premise, the familiar procedures of logical demonstration could then be followed, leading to a conclusion the truth of which was validated by extrapolation from the truth of the opening assertion. Such a procedure has since been characteristic of much 'modern' philosophical thinking, as in the Cartesian claim to doubt everything except what was deemed to be undeniable to Descartes himself. Secondly, Anselm was in effect declining to seek validation from ecclesiastical authority, a decision with considerable implications to which we can return later.

However, in the *Proslogion* one crucial difference or development from the *Monologion* is that the argument in the later text rather peculiarly rests upon a claim to an authority apparently greater than that of Augustine and perhaps even that of the Bible itself. Anselm in effect tells his reader that he had received a direct divine answer to his fervent prayers, a response which took the form of God himself providing the crucial phrase 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. The phrase thereby has a curious double status. It apparently operates as a premise in a stand-alone philosophical argument and has been treated precisely as such by later commentators. Yet it is also claimed to be a divine communication, of a particularly significant kind, not simply a message from God to a prophet but the direct revelation of a new 'name' for God himself, almost comparable to the enigmatic name revealed to Moses: 'I am that I am'.

What uniquely characterises Anselm's ostensibly philosophical starting-point is that the premise upon which he bases his position was itself allegedly provided by the very deity whose existence is supposedly established by the conclusion to be drawn from that premise: (you are) 'that

than which nothing greater can be conceived'. The peculiar circularity of this argument proceeds from an 'illumination' provided by that same deity. As we have seen in commenting upon the complex tapestry of personal pronouns and forms of address in the opening passages of the *Proslogion*, this self-sustaining loop can even be interpreted as quite literally 'self-evident' since the 'deity' which apparently provides the starting-point is arguably Anselm himself, speaking to himself in two *personae*, since it is he who also constructs in the text the *persona* of the God who speaks to him. The divine "You" who addresses the 'you' of Anselm and the "You" whom Anselm addresses are two voices in a dialogue in which Anselm actually speaks both voices himself. Obviously, by speaking in the voice of God one can be readily convinced that one has heard the voice of God. The problem of reliable 'self-evidence' is resolved by one self attributing to one's other self the required confirmation.

The opening section of the *Proslogion* is a 'dialogue' in which the divine 'You' is in fact represented as largely silent while Anselm addresses God in the second-person as "You" but also addresses himself as if on behalf of that God. Anselm had, he claims, experienced a personalised address or response directly from God, but only in that one moment of suddenly being given the crucial phrase to be subsequently recognised as constituting the desired single proof. Anselm is left to work out afterwards the implications for himself of this compressed formula.

As to some extent so is the reader. In reading the address by Anselm to himself as "homounculus", 'wretched little man', we are rhetorically drawn into being invited to take up a similar position of self-address. Once I start responding to Anselm's exhortation, I am seduced into accepting the notion that the 'speaker' is both Anselm *and myself* : I am encouraged by the text to impersonate or mimic Anselm's own 'I', to speak in his words and to enact them, including those implicitly attributed to 'God'. It is the initial move in what is not primarily a logical argument but, as I will suggest shortly, what I would call a 'literary conversion'.

We know that Anselm was regarded by his contemporaries as unusual in being able to read silently to himself. In the very act of reading to oneself what can seem to be happening is that some process, entity, or 'voice' is experienced as operating 'inside my head' or 'in my mind', as the assumed voice of the author whose text I am reading but at the same time my own voice. This speaking 'voice' is not outside me in the external world, but in a curious non-spatial territory which is somehow associated with my body or perhaps brain but is not visible or tangible.

Moreover, if I write down my own 'thought', it too can then become experienced almost as the text of somebody other than myself. In some circumstances one's own silent 'thinking' can easily be interpreted as the voice of conscience, the voice of reason, perhaps as a remembered parental voice, or even the authoritative voice of God.

This 'inner voice' aspect of my activity can present itself as mysterious, and may seem to provide grounds for claiming, as in some familiar versions of 'common sense', that when we speak to other humans it is these inner articulations of our 'spirit' that we are communicating to the 'spirit' of another person, as intangibly immaterial as my own inner spirit or voice. The notion of a non-localisable but ever-present divine Spirit can then seem a feasible assumption and conclusion: that it is the divine spirit who speaks 'in' my own mind or heart. Anselm while writing and reading his own text was both addressing "God" and 'hearing' God in the act of also addressing and persuading himself.

If, as many commentators since Gaunilo have claimed, the alleged logic of Anselm's overall argument can be so easily refuted, especially when couched in the schematic propositions of a formal syllogism, how could Anselm, who was certainly no 'fool', be himself persuaded by such a patently defective argument? Perhaps because he had read his text himself and had succumbed to his own textual construction. On Eadmer's account, Anselm had indeed been forced to reconstruct and make sense of his own argument by literally re-assembling its broken fragments. He had necessarily to become his own collaborative editor and first reader.

Regarded as a logical syllogism, the apparent structure of the *Proslogion*'s overall 'proof' is constituted by a major premise, that 'There is a God' as defined, with the minor premise that 'I can understand this notion of God', leading to the conclusion 'I am therefore right to believe in the existence of God', and indeed have no choice not to do so ('*non possum non intelligere*'). Whereas the actually operative structure in the *Proslogion* is arguably somewhat different: 'I believe (in) God', who has spoken to me, and since 'I am right to believe (in) this God' therefore 'There is a God'. The *Proslogion* is thus a three-stage process, enacting an initial quasi-performative *persona* as already provisionally a believer, through a more or less self-convincing articulation of the grounds for such belief, to a retrospective endorsement of the opening position. This structure is underpinned by a personally directed divine address, a form of private revelation, providing the self-evidence of the given divine formula. Such a pattern, I want to suggest, is quite commonly at work in the 'logic' of religious 'belief', and perhaps also sometimes in the ordinary experience of sudden 'insights' which 'come' to us.

literary conversion

Standard accounts of 'the ontological argument' present it as depending logically upon an idea, a concept or conceptualisation, even an implicit definition of the word 'God' encapsulated in the crucial phrase ('that than which nothing greater can be conceived'). Any such argument is vulnerable to objections which regard a particular definition, or the unpacking of the implications of that definition, as arguably unjustified, unsuccessful,

unpersuasive, or inescapably incoherent and self-contradictory. On my reading, however, Anselm's process of 'thinking' in the *Proslogion* is primarily grounded upon an action or practice, a participation in a way of life, rather than rationally derived from the logical elaboration of a concept. The core action is that of prayer, which constituted a complex combinatory of reciprocal addressing and being addressed. Anselm is addressing God, who is envisaged as in return addressing Anselm, if only in that single crucial moment of apparent illumination. Anselm's text might thus be regarded as involving a peculiar form of ventriloquism. Highlighting this aspect of Anselm's text does not simply emphasise a possibly dispensable rhetorical device operating in the text but points to the persuasive core of Anselm's argument, and perhaps more widely suggests a way of understanding the continuing viability of religious belief as an 'ideological' commitment.

In so far as we are invited to follow and enact a chain of thought, or a pathway of thinking, the apparent overall construction of the *Proslogion* is mis-leading. The articulation of the 'proof' comes early in the treatise, in the opening chapters, where the reader is invited and assumed to 'understand' the crucial but undefined term 'greater' without its explicit content being specified at that point. But then the rest of the treatise explores and explains the traditional attributes of the divine, and those later chapters can, or inevitably will, be taken into account *retrospectively* when the reader later re-assesses that initially opaque term 'greater' in the light of eventually reading the rest of the treatise.

Anselm's first use of the term 'greater' thereby acts as a *prior* summarisation of the traditional attributes of the divine which he is to expound only later in the text. If we take the criterion of 'greater' to be defined by reference to those attributes then the logic of the formulation of the treatise as a whole operates as a structural and almost reverse variation upon the usual organisation of a philosophical argument. The conclusion precedes the argument in what later scholastic terminology would term a 'consequent implication' or circular syllogism.

Put differently, the structural device at work in the text is more characteristic of a literary fiction than of a philosophical composition, and Anselm's *Proslogion* is an elaborate example of a form of textual construction which I have elsewhere termed 'literary conversion' and explored in some detail in relation to texts by Coleridge, Richardson, T. S. Eliot and others (see my *Literary Conversions*, 2015). A 'literary conversion' involves not only a 'suspension of disbelief' but a form of double-bind.

A literary text can be so constructed that in order to begin reading it we effectively have to agree, at least provisionally, to give credence to an element in the tale without which the rest of the narrative could not be coherently followed or accepted. As the text develops, however, we realise that our provisional acceptance has been retrospectively transformed into an increasingly unavoidable ongoing endorsement without which the text would fail not only to convince us, but actually to cohere at all. Most

obviously, at the end of a detective novel we discover who the criminal was and we can then retrospectively recognise what was the premise of the entire plot from the beginning. A classic example would be *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* in which the perpetrator is finally revealed as in effect the narrator. Raymond Chandler and the *nouveau roman* in different ways enjoyed exploiting and subverting the compositional conventions of the relation between narrator, detective, victim, and criminal. In a skilfully constructed science-fiction movie we can be seduced into allowing ourselves to believe in a highly implausible opening sequence which is only later explained and validated by the subsequent development of the scenario.

A recent instance of both the overall structure of a 'literary conversion' and a self-awareness concerning it as a literary device can be illustrated by an unusually explicit moment in Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Desertion*. In a chapter entitled 'An Interruption' which concludes Part One of the novel Gurnah writes:

> I don't know how it would have happened. The unlikeliness of it defeats me. Yet I know it did happen, that Martin and Rehana became lovers. Imagination fails me and that fills me with sorrow. I had thought that even without knowing the details of their affair I would be able to get to the truth of it, for imagination is a kind of truth. I do not mean that as a Romantic solipsism: it is only what I am able to imagine that is true. I mean that even with very incomplete knowledge, we can imagine what might have been, and how it might have come about and proceeded, but I find that in the case of Martin and Rehana I cannot settle on a sequence of events that seems likeliest. . . . Nonetheless, whether I am able to imagine it or not, I know that Rehana Zekariya and Martin Pearce became lovers. I have no choice but to try and give an account of how their affair might have happened.

Since the whole of Part Two of this multi-generational novel rests upon the intertwined stories of characters revolving partly around the consequences of the relationship between Martin and Rehana it is essential to the later action of the fiction that this unimaginable love affair actually happened. At the same time the colonial setting and the historical context of Part One makes the love affair and therefore the consequent narrative explicitly beyond the imagining of both the novelist and the reader who nevertheless must imagine it as having occurred.

Anselm's 'philosophical' text is a variation upon this persuasive literary device. In provisionally accepting the starting point of a procedure or argument and finding that this commits one to either endorsing later developments or retrospectively repudiating one's initial acceptance of the opening gambit, the later arguments of Anselm's text offer or provide a backwards-facing confirmation of the opening move. The overall argument

is thus retrospectively self-sustaining, rather than simply or obviously circular.

One might regard the traditional hermeneutical relationship between the New Testament and Old Testament as constructed along similar lines, with the notion of 'types' and 'anti-types' illustrated in the 'biblia pauperum' windows of the cathedral. The structural device which underpins this visual and theological presentation is the selection of a later incident as vindicating the status of an earlier 'prophecy'. Walter Benjamin's notion of plucking a moment from the past to constellate with the present has an affinity with this theological perspective. As perhaps does any serious personal or political commitment which is recognised in and by a retrospective confirmation of a significant practical decision, a basic life-choice, experienced as already previously made and now consciously endorsed in hindsight. The notion of 'moral luck' developed by Bernard Williams, and discussed in my *Upon A House*, (2015) has affinities with this structure and also with the computing process known as back propagation to be discussed somewhat later.

performance

Anselm was writing a text for his brethren to read, a script for them to enact, even perhaps reading it aloud to their fellow monks. His text is so rhetorically and emotionally constructed that they cannot read the opening address to "God" unless they endeavour to make it their *own* address to God, to adopt the *persona* of believing, which means that they are prompted already to believe him to exist. That life-choice is indeed endemic in the ostensible commitment they have previously and continuously made to the monastic life, and which might therefore seem to render the entire argument of the *Proslogion* redundant for them. If by the time they have finished reading the whole of the *Proslogion* and have been convinced by Anselm's arguments, they can sincerely address a God who has been 'proven' to exist, though even if Anselm's argument has not convinced them they can nevertheless be presumed, as monks, to be able and willing at least to continue to address God, as "Lord", "my Lord", and so to re-enter into the double-bind of the text. From the very beginning of the text the whole discourse has effectively been addressed to "God" and they, as engaged readers, would already have been addressing "God" and not merely defining a concept. Such an address would not make sense if 'God' did not exist, or if – like the Fool – they said 'in their hearts' (for reasons which might have nothing to do with being persuaded or otherwise by Anselm's argument) that 'God' did not exist. Which would be unacceptable as either premise or conclusion for a conscientious and honest monk continuing to live in the monastery.

However, the overall structure of the *Proslogion* addresses and involves any reader as if they too were already believing, even if the text claims to address also those who are not believers, by presenting itself as primarily a rational third-person statement of a logical proof. What then if a reader realises that they do not 'understand' the 'argument', or cannot be sure if they have understood it, or become uncertain whether it 'works' or not? What do they do at that point in reading the text? Do they simply abandon it, and stop reading? Or do they, having 'come this far' (and not just in the consecutive reading of the text), continue reading with a kind of ongoing provisional assent, which can take the form of only sort-of addressing "God" as the text requires, but as a kind of 'addressing' in quotation marks, a pretence or performance? Does that then count as a quasi-performative utterance? And does ceasing to read effect a kind of negative commitment, an unproven and perhaps premature assumption that the ontological proof does *not* work, and *will not* convince. Or should one venture the experiment again?

In one sense, this 'literary conversion' or double-bind structure is what Anselm had already provided in the opening proem, regarded as a performative script, even before the argument (it seemed) had actually begun. In reading the initial exhortation the reader is already invited to adopt the *persona* of one who addresses "God" and therefore as one who accepts, however provisionally, that such an addressee can exist.

The crucial underlying move is that the God so addressed precisely as the addressee of a prayer is also to be retrospectively identified with the God who emerges as the conclusion of the overall philosophical argument. There may of course be a variety of possible responses by Anselm's actual readers, of varying degreees of being persuaded or otherwise, of suspending belief or disbelief. Many later readers have felt quite genuinely unsure whether the 'proof' actually 'works' or not. As evidenced by a long history of ambivalent judgements on the purely logical validity of the 'proof' as 'extricated' from the whole text.

But what of Anselm himself? I might here ask whether Anselm was persuaded by his own arguments. Was Anselm absolutely sure himself? Recall again that in replying to Gaunilo Anselm did not, to begin with, claim that he would be answering 'the Fool' but rather responding to the Catholic who wrote 'in the *persona* of the Fool'. The reason Anselm can make that distinction is precisely because Gaunilo as a Catholic and as a fellow monk would indeed regularly and habitually 'address' God. As would the monk Anselm. The operative premise of the whole exercise is the belief that God can be so addressed. Which he could not be if he did not exist. Except by a kind of play-acting. But then a chasm opens before Anselm himself. Was his whole existence as a monk who prayed to God every day and night only a form of play-acting, an elaborate fiction, a script he was following? Even if he partly wrote it himself. One might here recognise a

variant upon his strenuous affirmation that he really did not want to be an Archbishop.

Any reader today who, to begin with, finds it distinctly odd to be addressing a God whom he or she does not believe exists might nevertheless decide to read the *Proslogion* anyway and try to assess Anselm's argument as it emerges, judging it as a valid or invalid philosophical exercise. But following that process can then curiously become one which would *retrospectively* justify the initial address to God which was only a notional or provisional starting point. Anselm's chapter 4 is addressed precisely to such a reader. It asks *how* (not whether) anyone could say 'in his heart' what he could not 'conceive':

> Chapter 4 : How has the fool said in his heart what cannot be conceived?
> (*Quomodo insipiens dixit in corde, quod cogitari non potest?*)
> But how has the fool said in his heart what he could not conceive; or how is it that he could not conceive what he said in his heart? since it is the same to say in the heart, and to conceive. But, if really, indeed, since really, he both conceived, because he said in his heart, and did not say in his heart, because he could not conceive, there is more than one way in which a thing is said in the heart or conceived.
>
> For, in one sense, an object is conceived, when the word signifying it is conceived; and in another, when the very entity, which the object is, is understood. In the former sense, then, God can be conceived not to exist; but in the latter, not at all. For no one who understands what fire and water are can conceive fire to be water, in accordance with the nature of the facts themselves, although this is possible according to the words.
>
> So, then, no one who understands what God is can conceive that God does not exist; although he says these words in his heart, either without any or with some extraneous signification. (*Nullus quippe intelligens id quod Deus est, potest cogitare quia Deus non est, licet haec verba dicat in corde, aut sine ulla aut cum aliqua extranea significatione.*) For God is that than which a greater cannot be conceived. And he who thoroughly understands this, assuredly understands that this being so truly exists that not even in concept can it be non-existent. Therefore, he who understands that God so exists, cannot conceive that he does not exist.

Anselm's use of 'in his heart' operates as a kind of shorthand for the entire process summoned up in the opening exhortation. Though in Anselm's vocabulary the phrase might be the equivalent of 'in his mind', a matter of intellectual grasp, with 'the heart' as the assumed *locus* of mental activity or comprehension, the force of its deployment here is to imply that a failure or refusal to grasp intellectually the meaning of the word 'God' as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived', and therefore

necessarily to accept the existence of God, is a matter of profound intellectual and emotional insincerity, of pretending to oneself that one has *not* understood or conceived when one necessarily has. In this instance, for Anselm 'it is the same to say in the heart, and to conceive' even as he recognises that 'there is more than one way in which a thing is said in the heart or conceived'. So, although Anselm proceeds by a kind of logical argument, the basic premise or starting point of the argument 'in his own heart' is not a proposition or a statement, but the action of addressing "God" as "You".

This is also, appropriately, the final move in the *Proslogion* text. Anselm concludes the argument with himself, as he began it, with an address to "God":

> I thank you, gracious Lord, I thank you; because what I formerly believed by your gift, I now so understand by your illumination, that if I were unwilling to believe that you exist, I should not be able not to understand this to be true.
> (*Gratias tibi, bone Domine, gratias tibi, quia quod prius credidi te donante, iam sic intelligo te illuminante, ut, si te esse nolim credere, non possim non intelligere.*)

So, one might ask, is it possible to understand a sentence without understanding its meaning?

inspiration

It is certainly possible to state or even to formulate a sentence without fully understanding it. Anselm claims precisely this: that it was God who provided the crucial phrase or premise without Anselm initially grasping its full implications. The theological term most germane to this possibility is 'inspiration', notably with reference to the Bible as providing another obvious context in which to locate Anselm's texts. It is after all not necessary that the recipient of divine 'prophetic' inspiration should actually understand it, only be committed to transmitting it. So one related issue is clarifying the difference between an 'inspired' text and one simply composed by its human author. A brief excursus may be useful before we return to Anselm.

Traditional accounts of prophetic inspiration have offered descriptions or explanations in terms of a direct divine dictation, for example hearing a 'voice', or a kind of spiritual infusion, perhaps an immaterial guidance not even fully conscious to or recognised by the author. This notion has been presented, or defended, in Karl Rahner's attempt at a modernised scholastic argument, which can be briefly summarised in some quotations from his *Inspiration in the Bible* (rev. ed. 1964, pp. 22, 40, 51, 61):

> The human author perceives something because God effectively wills him to do so, with a will which is not merely permissive . . but rather pre-defining—what is called in technical theology, a *praedefinitio formalis* . . The determining factor in an efficacious (as distinct from a merely sufficient) grace can consist in some external circumstance which God foresees, through his *scientia media*, will be decisive in a man's coming to his choice and is willed by God as such. . . God wills the church and brings it into being [because] . . his design for the incarnation of the Logos includes within itself the founding of the church. . . The concrete, fully realised essence of the church includes the scriptures; they are a constitutive element of her. . . The bible is not merely an externally adopted indifferent instrument of the apostolic church in performing her task; her normative function for the future church was exercised precisely by reducing to writing her *paradosis*, her faith, her self-constitution. . . the life-situation within which and out of which the scriptures arise is God's astonishing and mighty work of manifesting himself in human history through the prophets and through his Son. The scriptures' (formally predefined) emergence from this vital context is what makes them scriptures.

Decoding the Scholastic terminology, this argument displaces the work of divine inspiration onto the overall establishment of the church rather than any individual prophet.

Dennis McCarthy offers an even more revisionist account, here writing of the 'Yahwist' strand in the composition of the Old Testament (*Theological Studies*, XXXIV, pp. 553-576, my emphasis):

> In the reaction of the writer to his own historical experience resulting in a new interpretation in the light of Yahwist traditions, we have the same general factors as in the prophets: experience, tradition and personal reaction. However, the experience, instead of being a mystical contact with the divine, *came simply from living through a momentous era of history;* we can find no mark of extra-ordinary divine communication, yet this also is inspired writing.

In both these accounts the 'inspiring' action of God has been pushed further back or behind the immediate process of speaking or writing. No longer is the divine influence to be located directly in the 'mind and will' of the individual writer, but rather in the human author's complex reaction to a divinely-willed historical situation. But what is then left of the difference between this kind of 'influence' and the ordinary processes of trying to understand one's historical situation? McCarthy is more straightforward (my emphasis):

> The divinely guided community produced texts as an integral part of a complex process in which was the very life of the community. Further, this process was the term of the special divine guidance different from providence, conservation and so on, which God must have exercised on the community. *Otherwise Israel was not the chosen people* in any meaningful sense and its history [was not] salvation history, for all peoples and all history are under ordinary providence.

Rahner makes a similar point by distinguishing between 'concursus' (the 'ordinary providence' of McCarthy) and the 'formal predefinition' he claims to be operative in the case of the founding of the church and therefore in the 'inspiration' of the church's canonical writings. Characteristically, Rahner chooses to begin from a dogmatic definition, which already implies a notion of God as agency:

> Our starting point is the doctrine of inspiration as established in its basic outlines by the teaching authority of the church and further explained and expanded by the theologians, not the bible itself and whatever it may have to say about inspiration.

This obviously involves him in a circular argument, which he recognises (p. 36). But it would be possible to leave out altogether from his account of the relation between the community and its self-expression any notion of God-as-agent.

One could simply say that when the Israelite group finds itself involved in a new 'situation' in its history, it seeks to understand the significance of that new context, and the result is then a changed collective self-consciousness which finds expression in a normal cultural way through spokespersons and leaders. Since an integral part of the particular configuration of this tribal society is already a reference to its god, 'Yahweh' himself is partially re-defined in the process. In other words, Rahner's thesis reduces itself to a parenthesis in a tautology, as finally in the sentence (p. 61): 'The scriptures (formally predefined) emergence from this vital context is what makes them scriptures.'

The crucial factor emphasised by both these theologians is that the biblical writer speaks as the representative for or on behalf of a community and it is the overarching guarantee of the special status of that community which retrospectively validates the claim of divine providence. It is the community's own acceptance or approval which justifies the message as divinely inspired. Otherwise Israel was not the chosen people. Again, a self-sustaining circularity is in play.

Another way of highlighting the problem of 'inspiration' is to ask upon the basis of what extraordinary audacity or authorial arrogance would or could a human writer dare to present himself (usually male, of course) as composing the very words of God. Unless the claim of inspiration was

taken by the writer himself as self-evident, as underwritten by an individual experience, perhaps by a vision or voice of God. Only his own belief in that illumination could justify the self-confidence involved in composing God's own text. Or at least a belief in the privileged destiny of the particular community on whose behalf the writer assumes to speak. Such an account is of course open to a more sceptical interpretation, including seeing in the whole process a self-defined version of self-interest, individual or communal.

The notion that the Bible is 'inspired', as a claim founded upon assertions made to that effect within the Bible text itself, is a variant upon the circularity of self-evidence, as the Bible acknowledges. *Exodus* includes a variety of caveats as to why 'the people' might not be persuaded to believe in the claims made by Moses, and he is duly equipped with miraculous signs and even with a persuasive supplementary intermediary, Aaron, who can relay the words of Moses which themselves relay the words of God. Here is *Exodus* 19:3f., in the perhaps familiar 'Authorised King James Version':

> And Moses went up unto to God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians and how I bare you on eagles' wings and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel . . . So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them. [20:1f] And God spake all these words, saying, I [am] the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. . . .

We can skip the many words of God as apparently precisely remembered or exactly recorded in the text and go to *Exodus* 32:15:

> And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.

They were presumably quite large tablets if they included all these chapters.

The words of Moses's God are explicitly an interpellation, a command in the vocative addressed to the people and communicated by Moses: 'you are to obey the words spoken to you'. We are to believe, on the word of Moses, that Moses speaks the word of God. And that the written word of God is now as transcribed in the biblical text itself.

After numerous further words of God, *Leviticus* opens with a designated new location for these communications, as specified in *Exodus* chapter 40: 'And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying . . .' From chapter 4 onwards *Leviticus* simply repeats the formula: 'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying. . .' or 'Yahweh spoke to Moses. He said…'. (RC-authorised Jerusalem Bible translation). *Numbers* provides a regular date: 'And the Lord spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying …' Not unlike the first stone tablets, the Law itself can even be lost, but rediscovered and reconstructed, when necessary, by following further divine instructions in a new historical context.

Throughout, the people addressed as "you" by Yahweh are thereby both constructed as sharing a recalled past and by a promise of becoming the future "you" of an ongoing covenant with the divine, in the repeated continuity of a privileged history. To use McCarthy's phrases, the later 'inspirations' of the prophets 'came simply from living through a momentous era of history' motivating them to offer divinely authorised interpretations of that history without which 'Israel was not the chosen people'.

One more example: the opening words of the prophet Joel provides an identification of the writer himself, 'the word that was addressed to Joel son of Pethuel', as a prelude to a stream of vocative injunctions addressed variously to elders, drunkards, farmers, priests, and so on, with a regular reminder: 'But now – and it is Yahweh who speaks - come back to me with all your heart'. There is even a promise of the future proliferation of a shared capacity to speak God's word (*Joel* 2: 28):

> And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmade in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come.

The New Testament Gospels take this process a step further, providing an account of a new prophet – Jesus of Nazareth – focused firmly upon the life and actions as well as the sayings of the prophet himself, whose birth at a determinate time and place can be attested, and whose words are woven into a quasi-biographical narrative, of a miracle-working man who walks among ordinary people and can be seen and touched by them. And now it is not merely the son of Pethuel or Joseph who speaks the word of God but the very Son of the Father God himself who speaks God's own word somehow *as* God's own 'Word'. Moreover, the new significant history being lived through and re-interpreted is primarily the unique life and history of this prophet himself, not only as prophesying a future but as fulfilling the accumulated previous prophecies.

Luke 24: 13-35 provides the culmination of this entire process: after Jesus has 'explained to them all the passages, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, that were about himself' they broke bread with him 'and their eyes were opened and they recognised him'. What is self-evident to the Christ is now made self-evident to his disciples. The word of Yahweh now has a date, a biography, a location, numerous persuasively mundane miracles, and a new name of, and a new form of direct address to, God as "Our Father". Within that Jesus-centred narrative the Father himself rarely needs to speak directly, as in the baptismal interpellation ("in you I am well pleased") or the 'Transfiguration' episode ("This is my son, my chosen; listen to him!") and can even remain silent in response to the final address: 'why have you forsaken me?'

The issue of the self-awareness of Jesus himself in coming to his confirmatory recognition of his own role as the Christ or Messiah obviously constituted a unique theological problem, which the New Testament writers to some extent resolve by offering themselves as witnesses of the Father's confirmation of Jesus's claims, most notably in the resurrection narratives as an event transformative of all history: the inauguration of a new Israel, a chosen people beyond the boundaries of the old.

Early Christianity generated its own version of traditional prophetic inspiration and visions, including the confirmatory fulfilment of Joel's prophecy in the Apostles speaking in tongues at Pentecost, and culminating in a text which in the received canonical organisation of the New Testament texts provides a concluding *Revelation*. The preamble of the pseudo-Johannine Apocalypse asserts not a direct divine address but a layered transmission, an accumulated authorisation:

> The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him . . and he sent it . . by his angel unto his servant John who bare the record of the word of God and of the testimony of Jesus Christ and of all the things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads . .

This now multi-layered text can then incorporate direct verbal inspiration and divine address: 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me: Write…' (14: 13), 'And he saith unto me: Write… – these are the true sayings of God' (19: 9). The composition of *Revelations* thus partly side-steps the issue of audaciously inventing God's own words by its saturating of the text with a dense tissue of embedded quotations taken from previous inspired texts, including the Pentateuch and the prophets Ezekiel, Isaiah, Hosea, Daniel, and of course Joel.

Insofar, therefore, as the decisive historical change now to be reinterpreted was Christ's own life, any immediate witnessing of that history was traditionally supposed to have been concluded with the death of the last apostle, and their direct witness is then replaced and supplemented by that of the ongoing but yet again re-defined community. To provide a guiding interpretation was no longer the function of the prophets but of the institutional church. The later Roman theological position concerning 'Tradition' was the basis upon which authorised biblical interpretation was claimed to show that it is the church's own interpretation which is justified as the authentic interpretation.

This move constitutes another circular argument, not unlike that of a Communist Party interpreting Karl Marx's texts as justifying the control of the Communist Party over the interpretation of those texts. And it no longer matters whether the prophet himself understands the divine message he transmits since the task of 'understanding' it is not his responsibility but that of the church.

authority

Regarded in this overall context, Anselm's letter to Lanfranc, quoted earlier, implicitly marginalises the dogmatic role of the church itself, while the *Proslogion* makes clear Anselm's independence and audacity in providing his own new 'name' for God. His claim of a new illumination, a new starting-point, was presumably signalled in Eadmer's echo of Moses's broken tablets in the incident where Anselm had to piece together the broken clay tablets containing his own first attempt at recording the new name of God.

Anselm does not present himself as a 'prophet', but his stance would later be presented as a proto-Protestant repudiation of the church's dogmatic authority over and above that of even the inspired Bible itself. In McCarthy's terms, the later Reformation undoubtedly constituted a significant historical moment, requiring not only new interpretations of the divine promise but new interpreters, who were not lacking. Which suggests a further context for Anselm and his 'proof'.

Whereas the patristic and mediaeval periods had seen a proliferation of mainly short-lived and localised 'heresies' which could fairly easily be repressed by the encompassing power of a dominant ecclesiastical hierarchy, the post-Reformation era saw an increased number of instances

where an individual inspiration or revelation was no longer submitted to be assessed, rejected, or endorsed by the existing authoritative community, 'the' Roman church, but became the foundation for new faith communities which could outlast their individual initiators and continue to defy the existing ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Innovative theological mavericks such as Waldes, Hus, or Wycliffe, had generated some persistent followers, but most previous such charismatic figures had been safely incorporated within the existing institutional boundaries, with for example Benedict, Dominic, and Francis accommodated as merely founding religious 'orders' within the existing apparatus. What distinguished, say, Luther and Calvin from earlier reforming figures was that their spiritual stance and theological positions produced not a safely assimilated movement but a fracturing into rival and lasting institutional organisations. Their persistence was partly dependent upon competing secular political patronage but also crucially facilitated by the major reorganisation of media technology which enabled Luther above all to disseminate not simply his individually-voiced alternative interpretations but widely available printed polemical tracts.

The foundation for such reforming sects, denominations, and churches tended to be encapsulated under the name of a particular personality whose status as a divinely endorsed authoritative voice rested upon a variation of Anselm's own affirmation of confident self-assertion and independence: here I stand, I can do no other. Though Anselm himself did not initiate a religious order, a heresy, or even a school of followers, he has been plausibly claimed as the godfather of a considerable overall development in theological and philosophical inquiry. Which again makes him a focal figure.

The early Reformation model of individual founders was to be multiplied. For example, in the later 17th century the Quakers marked their beginning from George Fox whose singular vision on Pendle Hill in 1652 confirmed his personal revelation that it was possible to have a direct experience of Christ without the aid of an ordained clergy and to rely instead upon 'inward light of Christ', or the 'Holy Spirit'. His followers asserted that they too could encounter Christ directly and personally, 'to feel him to be my root, my life, and my foundation', as Isaac Penington wrote in 1670. In 19th-century America the Seventh-day Adventist Church was derived from the idiosyncratic prediction by William Miller, based upon his personal interpretation of *Daniel* 8:14–16, that Christ would return to Earth in 1843-44, later revised to exactly October 22, 1844, and then sensibly replaced by Hiram Edson's more circumspectly indefinite reinterpretation of Daniel. Adventist followers could also appeal for confirmation of their beliefs to the thousands of visions and dreams recorded by the extraordinary Ellen Harmon White, as based upon her personal reading of *Revelation*, who managed to write more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books to propagate her version of Adventist beliefs.

A generation later, the Jehovah's Witnesses movement developed from the Bible Student Movement founded in the late 1870s by Charles Taze Russell, and was initially characterised by a familiar fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible as the inspired and inerrant word of God. The movement quickly found it necessary to control any divergent interpretations by restricting the reading of the Bible to just one approved translation, the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, while individual Witnesses were discouraged from formulating doctrines and any merely 'private ideas' reached through their own Bible interpretations independent of Watch Tower Society publications and they were instructed not to 'advocate or insist on personal opinions or harbor private ideas when it comes to Bible understanding'. In other words, the Jehovah's Witnesses effectively returned to the notion of an authoritative church as necessary to validate any individual revelations and interpretations.

One might discuss the writings of several other founders of religious sects precisely as further instances of or variations on the underlying logic and ventriloquising 'inspiration' which constituted Anselm's core procedure in the *Proslogion*. Including not only, say, William Smith and the *Book of Mormon* but such quasi-religious variations of idiosyncratic self-persuasion as the *Diary* of John Dee, discussed earlier in relation to Meric Casaubon, whose own treatises on 'credulity and incredulity' might also be usefully recalled.

We might also consider the current revival or reactivation of several religious-political movements, including Islamic jihadists, Israeli Zionists, and US evangelical White Nationalists. The justification for these various religious-political positions characteristically includes appeals to the authority of a sacred text as the utterances of a singular God who speaks particularly favourably to only one such self-proclaiming group. The preferred divine text is often regarded as directly an address from God to each individual believer, even if indirectly mediated through a human preacher, imam, minister, charismatic individual, and so on. Each individual adherent is exhorted personally to choose or endorse a particular version of God, as distinct from other claimants to that status, if only by confirming retrospectively a belief-community born into, a faith inherited, or a commitment already made. Meanwhile, each imam or minister may in practice encroach upon the sacred text by offering their own paraphrases, interpretations, commentary, and even interpolations, with the voice of the preacher offering itself as providing the true voice of God. Especially in the performances of some American tele-evangelists or in the prayer-meetings of profitable mega-churches, the line between a divine and non-divine text, between inspiration and ventriloquism, may seem somewhat porous. As also the line between rational discourse and gibberish.

Insofar as the fundamental gambit of Anselm's argument was his speaking on behalf of God to himself, another obvious text to consider would be the Koran. Traditional accounts represent the Prophet's original

illuminations as sometimes a matter of inward hearing, occasionally as an audible divine voice, and most frequently as the dictation of the angel Gabriel. The much-disputed Sura VII, 157, can be interpreted as indicating that the oral revelations to the new Prophet precluded any mere recycling or incorporation of existing 'sacred' writings, including for example the Syriac liturgical texts which some scholars have proposed as sources for the Koran, since on this account Muhammad was simply unable to read. The title 'Koran' itself arguably refers to that kind of reading or recitation by which the related Syriac term *qeryana* denoted a liturgical reading or *lectio*, and which the followers are now instructed to read or recite as the very words of Allah. One tradition emphasises that the incomparable aesthetic quality of the Koran itself vindicates its divine origin, since no other text can match it for beauty and truth. Again a confirmatory claim which is circular, and a variant upon the allegedly self-evident, once the Koran is taken as itself providing the requisite criteria of beauty and truth.

In all these various instances a non-believer may recognise the same pattern of self-persuasion and claimed self-evidence as in the fundamental procedure of Anselm speaking on behalf of God to himself in the *Proslogion*.

As with Anselm's reader, each individual believer is necessarily involved in a process of self-persuasion, and any proclamation or declaration such as 'I am saved' or 'I have been chosen' is as much an affirmation to oneself as to an audience of fellow-believers, or opponents. Any adult transition from comparatively passive membership or affiliation to fully explicit allegiance ordinarily involves the underlying three-stage process undertaken by a reader of the *Proslogion*: a 'literary conversion' sequence, from an initial persona as already a (possible) believer, through a more or less self-convincing articulation of the grounds for belief, to a retrospective endorsement of a more committed version of the opening provisional stance. At its core, what is essentially involved is 'addressing' oneself as the 'you' who is undergoing or confirming the conversion process.

This basic structure which appears common in affirmations of religious allegiance may take the form of a dramatic born-again moment, perhaps an experience of individual illumination or inspiration, which might sometimes be encapsulated in an affirmation not simply of conversion but of a willing self-sacrifice, if only in the form of a substantial financial contribution towards one's preferred tele-church.

Arguably indeed, any adoption or endorsement of a basic belief system rests finally upon some such claim of the 'self-evident', whether reinforced or not by a supplementary illumination. How far this pattern is also characteristic of political allegiance and even of arriving at self-convincing theoretical insight would be worth exploring. As would the differences between the procedures of traditional 'mainstream media' and the self-persuasive operations of internet influencers and conspiracy theorists.

Think back again to the implications of Anselm's starting point. The peculiar and possibly unique character of Anselm's God-given phrase was that it is presented as divinely inspired and yet seems to require no other validation than itself. It is both 'inspired' and wholly self-sufficient, independent of ecclesiastical authority on both counts. Yet its alleged divine origin is strictly irrelevant to its status as the self-unfolding premise of a logical argument, and divine authorship is not what gives the phrase its philosophical authority or validity. If the implications of the phrase can be logically followed through to the point where the very existence of the divine is sustained, it then becomes immaterial whether the phrase derived from God in the first place.

Moreover, each reader is being offered the experience of receiving the exact crucial phrase in much the same way that Anselm was himself allegedly offered it, except that the illuminating encounter now comes from reading Anselm's text rather than direct from God. The moment of 'inspiration' is now located in the text, not in hearing the voice of God. Though if the 'proof' is valid it also establishes the very possibility of such divine inspiration.

Two different directions might therefore be traced from this oddly hybrid inspired/philosophical text. The mediaeval church was deeply suspicious of private revelations or prophetic inspirations and Anselm does not present himself as a 'prophet', but as a philosopher. Yet his stance would later be represented as a proto-Protestant repudiation of the Roman church's dogmatic authority and as the affirmation of an intrinsically personal and individual 'faith', as in Karl Barth's complex engagement with Anselm in his influential *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (written in 1931, published in 1958).

On the other hand, Anselm's strictly philosophical argument figured persistently in the debates which constituted the post-Reformation 'rational' Enlightenment. It was Kant who coined the very phrase 'ontological proof' to characterise the *Proslogion*'s argument as an instance of precisely what Kant's entire philosophical system sought to present as epistemologically problematic, an analytic statement which entailed a synthetic assertion, a purely logical deduction of an empirical proposition. As the editors of the Cambridge edition of the 1997 *Critique of Pure Reason* point out: 'Kant's critique of the ontological argument is in a sense the oldest part of his critical philosophy' (p. 747).

But it is then worth noting that Kant's letter to Marcus Herz (February 21, 1772), often seen as decisively marking the Kantian 'Copernican revolution', is shortly followed in the collected correspondence by several letters seriously debating Herder's argument in *The Oldest Document* that the mysterious Hermes diagram was 'the first instruction of the human race' which came 'directly from the hand of God', and was indeed 'God's stroke of the pen' which preceded and underpinned even the 'Books of Moses'.

The peculiar problematic of alleged divine 'inspiration' persisted into the age of Enlightenment.

Claims of inspiration are not, of course, the normal context in which Anselm's *Proslogion* has been considered. It is usually treated as a contribution to philosophical inquiry, since whatever its source, allegedly divine or otherwise, the crucial phrase can be treated as a possibly valid premise for a logical argument. However, if we now situate Anselm's work in the context of the history of philosophy it is again difficult to know quite what sort of claims to make for it. Was it, as is sometimes asserted, an innovation in philosophical thinking, an advance instance of what became known as scholasticism or perhaps even a much later secular rationalism, by providing a version of the search for 'self-evident' axioms.

The development after Anselm of theology and institutional philosophy meant that Anselm's uncertainties about his own status and identity, discussed earlier in relation to Eadmer's account of his life, might perhaps have been partly resolved had he been able to pursue his commitment to teaching and thinking as a full-time university professional, not as a monastery *grammaticus*. But Anselm was a generation too early for such an academic position, though in Lanfranc's monastery at Bec he had been both pupil and teacher in what might be regarded as a proto-university.

As Lanfranc would have insisted, the traditional way of writing theology had primarily appealed to and was based upon the authority of biblical texts as offering divinely revealed truths. In the Old and New Testaments the various appearances of 'what we call God' are partly couched in narratives involving characters who act and speak, and in the promulgation of commands, promises, and laws envisaged as having their origins ultimately in the 'word' of God.

A Bible-based theology was open to the latent objection that the text or texts in question can have no self-evident status as revelation, except in a circular argument, and indeed that the very notion of 'revelation' or textual 'inspiration' has no coherent credibility. There can also be particular rejections of the alleged significance or interpretation of specific elements of the sacred texts in question, whether inconsistencies of narrative or irreconcilable facets of the 'characters' depicted. For example, the Yahweh in the Old Testament is presented as both vengefully vindictive and mercifully generous, as both faithful to his promises and apparently arbitrary in his choices. Much apologetic argument was concerned with reconciling such apparently incompatible elements found within supposed revelatory texts.

The partial assimilation or incorporation of Plato's philosophical positions into the early formulations of Christian belief during the first few centuries had often resulted in a theology explicitly deploying Neoplatonic terms and arguments, but without systematically validating or defending those positions. Platonic philosophy was often embedded or entangled in the very way of thinking theologically.

By contrast, there is a kind of division or two-stage order implicit in Anselm's *Monologion* : that one could assemble clear rational arguments to demonstrate the truth, or at least the plausibility, of basic theistic beliefs, prior to and separate from a subsequent consideration of the specifically Christian or theological components of that belief system. Anselm can be seen as deploying an implied distinction between 'philosophy' and 'theology' which was eventually to become the basis for the standard pedagogical programme in which candidates for the priesthood would first study philosophy and then theology. Anselm's method is thus part of a wider shift in the professionalisation of thinking itself.

Anselm has too frequently been called the 'godfather of scholasticism', but the epithet does indicate that in the century or so after his death in 1109 significant changes occurred in the ways in which theological 'thinking' was conducted and organised, with an increasing emphasis upon rigorous and systematic argument. Anselm did not himself provide an articulated overview of his own theology, but in composing his several separate treatises he was concerned to draw his reader's attention to the interconnections between his writings, so that, for example, the argument in the treatise on the procession of the Holy Spirit was to be recognised as interdependent with the arguments in the treatise on the Incarnation, while the treatise on the fall of the devil was the contextual framework for the dialogue on 'why God became man' and the treatises on the Blessed Virgin.

In the preface to his treatise on truth, Anselm had written (Schmitt, I, p.174):

> Although obviously these treatises do not cohere by any continuity of composition, the matter dealt with and their similarity of argumentative mode required that they be written in the order that I have presented them. Therefore, although they were impatiently transcribed by some in a different order before they were completed, I wish them to be ordered as I have now arranged them.

Anselm insists upon following an overall order for the reading of his various separate treatises because the arguments within them constitute a sequence, just as the arguments within the *Monologion* constituted a 'chain' of linked steps. Anselm's insistence that his writings be read in a certain sequence became a feature of the 'standard model' of scholasticism. Indeed, the first systematic exposition of overall theological argument composed explicitly for the use of ordinary clergy may possibly have been prompted by Anselm himself. The *Elucidarium* composed by Honorius of Autun seems to have been written under the direct aegis of Anselm, and perhaps also of Eadmer, at Canterbury in the late 1090s or early 1100s. It was translated not only into Anglo-Saxon but also French and German and some 300 surviving manuscripts attest to its widespread popularity and likely influence.

From the first part of the 12th century we can see a shift in the location of theological thinking from the practices of the preacher and the ambience of the monastery towards that of the university. As it happens, another figure associated with Canterbury has left an account of those developments. The *Metalogicon* of John of Salisbury is partly a memoir of his twelve years or so from 1136 attending lectures in Chartres and Paris and includes an account of the increased emphasis on the teaching of logic. He was subsequently attached to the households of consecutive archbishops of Canterbury, first Theobald and then Becket, and wrote a *Life* of Anselm, commissioned by Becket to support attempts to have Anselm canonized. John's *Metalogicon* was probably written at Canterbury in about 1159, fifty years after Anselm's death, and its title echoes those of Anselm himself. One can suppose that John too once knelt before a tomb or altar dedicated to Anselm and perhaps even read Anselm's works in his own autograph manuscripts then still in the monastic library at Canterbury.

John of Salisbury

John's *Metalogicon* Book IV defends the increasing use of Aristotle though he was writing before the full impact of Aristotle's newly translated texts. Some passages (adapted from McGarry's 1954 translation) can indicate both the attraction and the difficulty of assimilating Aristotle:

> The science of the *Posterior Analytics* is extremely subtle, and one with which few mentalities can make much headway. This fact is evidently due to several reasons. In the first place, the work discusses the art of demonstration, which is the most demanding of all forms of reasoning. Secondly, the aforesaid art has by now practically fallen into disuse. At present demonstration is employed by practically no one except mathematicians, and even among the latter has come to be almost exclusively reserved to geometricians. The study of geometry is, however, not well known among us, although this science is perhaps in greater use in the region of Iberia and the confines of Africa. [i.e. Islam] (Chapter 6)

> In demonstration, it is first necessary to know beforehand the principles of the various departments of learning, and thence, by reasoning, to infer conclusions based on the necessity of incontrovertible truths. In so doing, one must, as it were, use every effort to fortify and consolidate his proofs, lest there seem to be, as if through lack of necessity, some gap, which would jeopardise the strict proving force of demonstrative science. By no means all science, but only that which is based on truths that are primary and immediate, is demonstrative. Not every syllogism provides demonstration, strictly so-

called, although every real demonstration consists in a syllogism. It is the inherent nature of science to strive for demonstration. . .
Demonstrative logic also explains what syllogisms and propositions should be employed, as well as what influence the quantity and quality of syllogisms, carefully considered, have on the force of proof or refutation. It further answers the questions as to what is a syllogism, what is called into question, and what figure is suitable for the syllogism. It so establishes the science of demonstration, that we may be as certain of things which our reason proves to be indubitably true as if we held them in our hands. Universal concepts derive their credibility from the fact that they are inductively inferred from particular things. As Aristotle says, 'the only possible way to conceive universals is by induction, since we come to know an abstraction by induction. But unless we have sense experience, we cannot make inductions. Even though sense perception relates to particular things, scientific knowledge concerning such can only be constructed by the successive steps of sense perception, induction, and formulation of universal.' And again 'sense perception is a prerequisite for memory; the memory of frequently repeated sense perceptions results in experimental proof; experimental proofs provide the materials science or in art.' (Chapter 8)

Chapter 16 specifies the human capacity for reasoning as the distinguishing mark of the human soul:

> Although brute animals have a certain power of discernment whereby they select their food, shun snares, leap across precipitous places, and recognise relationships, still they do not reason but are rather moved by their natural instincts. Although they have mental images of many things, they are by no means able to reason concerning causes. The Hebrews say that this is due to the fact that when, in the beginning of creation, by the divine disposition, other creatures were formed, and with the fomentation of warmth and moisture, acquired that natural, animate, sentient form, which is the vital principle of appetite and imagination, and which is possessed by brute animals, to man alone was given the more efficaciously and objectively truthful power of argumentative reasoning. For God, breathing life into man, willed that he partake of the divine grace. The soul of man, which comes from and will return to God, alone contemplates divine truth. This prerogative is, in fact, almost man's sole claim to preeminence over other animals.

Newly translated works of Aristotle were increasingly crucial to the changes in university teaching of philosophy and theology and particularly prompted an emphasis on systematicity. This overall development was partly due to the awareness not so much of the challenge of the Islamic

religion itself as the impact of Greek philosophical sources which had been preserved within the Islamic intellectual milieu and were beginning to circulate in Christian Europe as a result of the Islamic presence in Spain, southern Italy and Sicily. The influx into Europe of several treatises of Aristotle included the great commentaries by Islamic scholars such as those known in Europe as Avicenna and Averroes. This rediscovery might be regarded, in McCarthy's terms, as registering a change in the historical situation and prompting a paradigm shift in intellectual practice, including thinking about theology itself.

Other contributions had also prepared for the changes. In discussing John Pecham I briefly highlighted three texts important in that overall development: the *glossa ordinaria*, Abelard's *Sic et non*, and Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. I suggested that: 'What was constructed by this combination of texts and procedures was, in effect, a machine for systematic thinking'. That implicit reference to computers and 'artificial intelligence' can shortly be pursued in the context not only of Anselm's innovative works but of a more recent paradigm shift. Let me first deal more fully with the three texts mentioned earlier and then add one other crucial text before we return to Anselm and the problem of 'thinking'.

three texts

From the 1120s there gradually emerged a composite text, which was not a single volume by a single author, but a gradually expanding and eventually enormous assemblage of quotations from an impressive range of authorities and commentators, a compilation known as the *Glossa ordinaria* or ordinary (ordered) gloss on the Bible. Modelled partly on the layout of manuscripts of Roman law or the Hebrew Bible, the *Glossa* was designed so that on each page a few lines from the consecutive biblical text were presented in a central panel which was densely surrounded by quotations excerpted from numerous different sources and offering different kinds of 'gloss' upon the selected brief unit of text. The complete text of each book of the Bible could be arranged continuously in this way and provided exactly the kind of compilation which Lanfranc would have welcomed as an essential tool for finding and citing the 'authorities' he had requested Anselm to provide in the *Monologion*. There is some evidence that the exiled Thomas Becket later commissioned some of the more elaborate extant manuscripts of the whole work.

There was no attempt within the *Glossa* itself to reconcile potentially incompatible glosses upon each short biblical passage, but the complex format stimulated the elaboration of different modes of interpretation of each excerpt according to the traditional patristic four 'senses' now often conveniently arranged together on the same page. The literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical senses can be briefly indicated in a well-known doggerel:

Lettera gesta docet, *quid credas allegoria,*
Moralia quid agas, *quo tendas, anagogia.*

The literal teaches what happened,
the allegorical, what you should believe,
the moral, what you should do,
the anagogical, where you are going.

The complete *Glossa* is not easy to find or to read in print nowadays, though it was extensively copied and re-copied in manuscript and would have been in most monastic libraries either partially or in full, but the complex format made it difficult to print. After his third edition of the *glossa* was printed by Froben in 1508 the six huge volumes were supplemented by one entirely given over to an index of the complete work. Subsequent printers were so deeply reluctant to have to re-paginate the complex Index references that the page layout and numbering was preserved exactly through later editions up to 1617. The standard 19th-century collection the *Patrologia Latina* includes the *Glossa* but only in an extremely poorly arranged late version and misleadingly attributes it to a single author, Anselm of Laon. Very little of the *Glossa* has yet been translated into English and it would still be a formidable design and printing project while an online critical digital edition would have its own problems.

Reading multiple juxtaposed glosses could make disparities between them more clearly problematic as requiring reconciliation. In the late 1120s Peter Abelard composed his *Sic et Non*, a title translateable as 'Yes & No' or 'So and Not So'. The text consisted of over a hundred and fifty paired groups of statements on specific topics with each of the 'chapters' comprising a collage of opposing authoritative statements, culled from various approved Church Fathers, from classical writers, and from the Biblical text itself. These contrasting and apparently incompatible juxtapositions posed the question as to which source or authority was correct, this one or that, yes or no? The title and the overall arrangement indicated that the answer might sometimes be both yes *and* no, Sic *et* Non.

Abelard's proem to his compilation recalls Lanfranc's objections to Anselm's *Monologion*, and in effect poses a direct riposte to Lanfranc's position (I am gratefully indebted to the 2007 self-published translation by the late indefatigable Priscilla Throop):

> There are many seeming contradictions and even obscurities in the innumerable writings of the church fathers. Our respect for their authority should not stand in the way of an effort on our part to come at the truth. The obscurity and contradictions in ancient writings may be explained upon many grounds, and may be discussed without impugning the good faith and insight of the fathers . . even the best

> authors often introduce the erroneous views of others and leave the reader to distinguish between the true and the false. Sometimes, as Augustine confesses in his own case, the fathers ventured to rely upon the opinions of others. . . All writings belonging to this class are to be read with full freedom to criticize, and with no obligation to accept unquestioningly; otherwise the way would be blocked to all discussion, and posterity be deprived of the excellent intellectual exercise of debating difficult questions of language and presentation.

Abelard adds:

> In view of these considerations, I have ventured to bring together various *dicta* of the holy fathers, as they came to mind, and to formulate certain questions, which were suggested by the seeming contradictions in the statements. These questions ought to serve to excite tender readers to a zealous inquiry into truth and so sharpen their wits.

Abelard's 'chapter' headings for these arrangements of conflicting quotations included for example the following 'questions':

> Must human faith be completed by reason, or not?
> Does faith deal only with unseen things, or not?
> Is there any knowledge of things unseen, or not?
> May one believe only in God alone, or not?
> Is God a single unitary being, or not?
> Is God divided into three parts, or not?
> Is God to be seen as a part of everything, as present in everything, or not?
> Does the first Psalm speak about the Messiah, or not?
> Does God's foreknowledge determine outcomes, or not?
> Does anything happen by accident or coincidence, or not?
> Can even sins please God, or not?
> Is God the cause and initiator of evil, or not?
> Can God do anything and everything, or not?
> Does God know everything, or not?

A chapter or 'question' may take only half a page with just two or three contrasting quotations, but some stretch over several pages with numerous passages assembled, and sometimes the degree of contradiction or incompatibility between them is not even immediately apparent. The prologue concludes:

> The master key of knowledge is, indeed, a persistent and frequent questioning. Aristotle, the most clear-sighted of all the philosophers, was desirous above all things else to arouse this questioning spirit, for

> in his *Categories* he exhorts a student as follows: 'It may well be difficult to reach a positive conclusion in these matters unless they be frequently discussed. It is by no means fruitless to be doubtful on particular points.' By doubting we come to examine, and by examining we reach the truth.

How the reader or student was to 'reach the truth' and decide between the contesting authorities was left open by Abelard. He nowhere in the *Sic et non* indicated how a 'proof' could adjudicate between contradictory positions or arguments. Most radically, Abelard's text implies that a proposition or even a doctrinal position might be irreconcilable with another, that a proposition might be both true and false, and may even pose the possibility of two distinct truths, one philosophical and the other theological, a position which was later explicitly condemned as heretical.

Significantly, the new 'Master' of thinking was now deemed to be Aristotle, whose basic writings on logic had long been taught as part of the traditional educational curriculum, but whose other texts were soon to become increasingly available. As with Abelard's other work the *Sic et non* was not wholly reputable (though we know that Christ Church library had a copy), but it may have prompted the need to investigate more rigorously what contrasting propositions might mean if understood in the context in which they were constructed.

A third innovative and influential work signalled a further development in how theology was to be studied and taught. Augustine and others had written a variety of theological treatises upon a range of Christian doctrines, and Augustine had composed a kind of overall summary, the *Enchiridion*, but much of the doctrinal teaching of the Church Fathers was to be found primarily in separate polemical treatises and scattered in sermons or extensive commentaries on specific biblical texts. Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences* which dates from the 1150s offered a different model.

Like the *Glossa* and the *Sic et non* it consisted largely of quotations, not arranged to highlight local opposing positions but organised according to an overall treatment of the whole range of Christian doctrine. Like Abelard's, Lombard's text takes the form of a series of 'questions' but now more systematically ordered to constitute a chain of linked arguments orchestrating relations between individual 'questions'. In addition to outlining arguments for and against a particular position Lombard's structure provided for an explicit adjudication between opposing positions, with a section called the *Responsio* in each *quaestio* giving his own solution to the various questions posed.

Here is a sample of the contents list, from the *Prologue* to Lombard's work

> DISTINCTION II
> # 1: On the Trinity and Unity.
> # 2: What was the intention of those writing of the Trinity?

3: What order is to be observed, when dealing with the Trinity?
4: On the testimonies of the Old Testament, by which the Mystery of the Trinity is declared.
5: On the testimonies of the New Testament, pertaining to the same.
DISTINCTION III
1: On the cognition of God through the creatures, in which the vestige of the Trinity appears.
2: On the image and similitude of the Trinity in the human soul.
3: On the similitude of the creating and created trinity.
4: On the unity of the Trinity.
DISTINCTION IV
1: Whether God the Father begot Himself God?
2: Whether the Trinity may be predicated of the one God, as the one God of the Three Persons?

This attempt at overall organisation was in effect combined with the approach suggested by Abelard's *Sic et non*, but so that each division of Lombard's *Sentences* is presented in the form of 'questions' arranged for discussion in a standard format. The various positions relevant to the 'question' are first surveyed by assembling both supporting and opposing quotations and authorities, but then the *Responsio* offers a concise argument supporting the preferred conclusion, and this is followed by a brief refutation of each of those previously considered positions which are now to be rejected. The resolution of the contradictions or incompatibilities is provided predominantly by reasoned arguments rather than by simply selecting a preferred authority. The impression given by the complex organisation of the *Sentences* is of systematically following through a rationally constructed overall 'chain' of arguments, as Anselm had regarded his *Monologion* as providing, but now encompassing the whole span of christian doctrines.

So influential was Lombard's way of organising his connections between the multiple components of theological inquiry that every aspiring university teacher of theology was eventually required to provide his own commentary upon the *Sentences* by delivering a series of lectures more or less following the order and arrangement of Lombard's text. After that apprenticeship a lecturer might attempt to provide his own overall presentation of the scope of christian theology, a *summa*.

The culminating monument in this genre was Aquinas's great *Summa theologiae*, composed between 1266 and 1273 and comprising more than fifty volumes in the standard English translation. The *Summa* combined and orchestrated the crucial elements of the three texts: the deployment of an extensive range of scriptural and other authorities, juxtaposed in *pro* and *contra* arguments within a series of questions, and together comprising an overarching systematicity.

For example, in the same *Quaestio* as the discussion of Anselm's 'ontological argument', partly quoted earlier, Aquinas offered his own version of proofs for the existence of God, the famous 'five ways'. After considering a variety of authorities and arguments for and against the proposition being debated in the question 'Whether God exists?', Aquinas provided his *responsio* (ST I, Q 2, article 3):

> I answer that: The existence of God can be proved in five ways.
> The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion [change]. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, i.e. that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another. If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs to be put in motion by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God. (*Ergo necesse est devenire ad aliquod primum movens, quod a nullo movetur: et hoc omnes intelligunt Deum.*)

The argument is offered as strictly philosophical or rational, not dependent upon quoting biblical texts or citing authoritative predecessors, though utilising distinctions and terms derived from Aristotle, including the key concept of 'motion' as any form of change. Any riposte or refutation would therefore also have to be at the level of logical counter-argument, as also a in the following further argument:

> The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be

> the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God. (*Ergo est necesse ponere aliquam causam efficientem primam: quam omnes Deum nominant.*)

Aquinas characteristically constructs what are effectively concise syllogistic arguments, sequences of propositions which taken together can be offered as supporting an unavoidable conclusion. The argument from 'motion' concludes with the assertion that the first mover is 'what everyone understands to be God', while in the argument from efficient causes the first efficient cause is that 'to which everyone gives the name of God' – claims about understanding and linguistic usage which are not themselves strictly part of the logical conclusion.

Aquinas's mode of argument in these passages is obviously not that of a commentary on the Bible or a patristic sermon, though he also composed works in both genres, and throughout the *Summa* the 'questions' he discussed were often at least indirectly derived from the Bible and the Fathers. Here his argument is clearly influenced in its focus and terminology by Aristotle ('motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality', 'efficient cause', etc.) and we might want simply to add Aristotle's works as a fourth 'text' in the 12th-century transformation of university teaching. The relation to Aristotle was however considerably more complex, as we will see.

The Philosopher

Taken together, the three texts outlined could be regarded as constituting a three-stage process, a sequence of knowledge acquisition and intellectual decision-making: the *Glossa* as initial data-gathering or accumulative input, the *Sic et non* as preliminary organisation and weighing of evidences, the *quaestio* and its dialogical structure as actively generating decisions and judgements. The primary material forming the basis for this procedure for thinking remained the Bible itself and it is sometimes overlooked how even the most abstract Scholastic arguments generally took a biblical text as their starting point. But the increasing availability of Aristotle's work provided an impressive example of precisely such a co-ordinated procedure in action,

and one in which the primary material discussed was not biblical texts but largely generated from within the scope of Aristotle's oeuvre itself, especially as its full range became more accessible.

If one reads through the collected works of Aristotle in, say, the Oxford twelve-volume translation there can be a sense of moving within an interrelated system of inquiries which taken together almost constitute a circular loop, from the preliminary text-books on logic to the partly fragmented architecture of the 'metaphysics'. Within the overall corpus there is a range of treatises which primarily comprise 'data gathering', bodies of empirical investigations organised into constructed classifications, ranging from the diversity of animal species to the differences between political constitutions, from the multiple devices of rhetoric to the characteristics of successful drama, from the phenomena of meteorology to the multifarious behaviour of human beings. And each inquiry is situated with reference to related or ancillary investigations which underpin or derive from each treatise in turn, including for example the complex trajectory which can take us from the analysis of spatio-temporal terms in the *Physics* to the conceptual apparatus of the *Metaphysics* which returns us again to the foundational logic of the *Organon*.

Aquinas and many of his generation of professional university philosophers and theologians approached Aristotle's work precisely as such a system or network of linked treatises, and they collectively devoted very detailed commentaries to each of the Aristotelian texts while constantly cross-referring in their own work to the complex spectrum of the overall Aristotle corpus and to the many other commentators upon it.

The established practice of biblical reconciliation and cross-linking was increasingly applied to this secular body of work, but when the dialectical approach of the *Sic et non* was applied to the Bible it primarily involved reconciling particular texts, whereas when applied to Aristotle it necessitated trying to reconcile overall Christian doctrine with the whole of Aristotle, which also involved negotiating a challenge to the Platonic philosophical elements already incorporated into some traditional Christian thinking and theology.

All this in a historical context partly shaped by the direct and indirect impact of a non-Christian religious belief system, the Islamic culture which was itself the source of transmission for the Aristotelian texts. Which thereby involved not only changes in pedagogical procedures for thinking but raised issues concerning the very nature of thinking itself. The first *quaestio* in Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* is whether theology is a 'science'. In Aristotle's terms the fundamental data or input for a rigorous 'science' cannot be simply what he termed *endoxa*, general 'common sense' or 'public opinion', but requires reliable and rigorous examination, including appropriate empirical investigation. It would not be adequate simply to assert that the first mover is 'what everyone understands to be God' and Aquinas's argument for the first mover or cause partly depended upon a

conceptual engagement with Aristotle's treatise on 'physics' as well as his 'meta-physics'.

Reliance on a purely logical premise such as Anselm's argument would certainly not suffice. Though later somewhat discredited as mere scholasticism, the procedures for 'thinking' established in the 12th century created a basic model which has arguably remained paradigmatic until the potential shift indicated by recent developments in what is now called 'artificial intelligence'.

At this point I want to consider in some considerable detail one Aristotle text in particular, normally referred to as the *De anima*, which arguably still profoundly influences any attempt at thinking about thinking, including 'artificial' thinking. If the three paradigmatic texts constituted a procedure or method for thinking they did not clarify what was doing the thinking.

anima

De anima is the Latin translation of *Peri psyche*, usually further translated into English as *On The Soul*, a title which suggests a primarily philosophical or even metaphysical treatise. We earlier registered Anselm's own use of the term 'soul' in his letters and we might too readily think that we understand what Anselm and the conventional usage of the term 'soul' means. In English it is generally taken to refer to some kind of 'spiritual' entity responsible for individual human identity, and many would today take for granted this notion of 'soul' even if they are unable to give a coherent account of what the term means. If there is one.

However, for some mediaeval Aristotelians the appearance of Aristotle's *Peri psyche* in a number of Latin translations, with the first version appearing shortly after Anselm's death, made the traditional Christian notions of 'soul' more problematic by providing an alternative approach from Plato's and one less easily amenable to the everyday language of received Christian beliefs.

Moreover, the *De anima* is arguably not itself a fully consistent or coherent text. It is worth noting that Aristotle's Greek text had been variously translated into Syriac, Persian, and Arabic, before it was made available in Latin. There were three main Latin translations, of which one was from the Arabic rather than the Greek, and there were several major Islamic commentaries on the text also available in different Latin versions.

The Greek term *psyche* was normally translated into Latin as '*anima*' to indicate what 'animates', what gives life, what makes something alive. But to translate '*anima*' into modern English as 'soul' implies that when Aristotle says that a living plant or an insect has *psyche* he is supposedly claiming that a plant has some kind of 'spirit' responsible for its individual identity.

Aristotle's text is however arguably more appropriately regarded as contributing to a treatise in natural history and the title 'concerning *psyche*' could almost be translated simply as 'on life' since the text was probably

one of a series of treatises or lectures on what we would now call biology or zoology, including works with titles such as 'parts of animals', 'history of animals', 'generation of animals', etc. Anyone who regards Aristotle primarily as an abstract philosopher should browse through the several substantial volumes on 'animals' where he examines in considerable detail some five hundred species of living beings, with much of the treatment based upon his own practical fieldwork, particularly in what we would now call marine biology. I particularly recommend the dissection of a cuttlefish treated in some detail. Armand Marie Leroi's study *The Lagoon: How Aristotle Invented Science* (2014) is an excellent introduction.

The *De anima* treatise is concerned with living beings as distinct from non-living objects, which were to be considered elsewhere, in the *Physics* and related texts. Surveying and summarising the accumulated data from empirical examinations of animal species, Aristotle outlined a classificatory schema whereby different kinds of living things are categorised according to their capacities, from the most basic species of 'living' creature which is able simply to feed and to reproduce itself, through more complex 'animals' which are able in addition to move of their own accord, to the human species which adds to these several capacities an ability also to 'think' or 'reason', though such English terms cover a range of meanings.

In Aristotle's classification what differentiates the human *psyche* from other animal life is in part the human 'intellect' as a function or activity of the specifically human form of animal life. But Aristotle also readily characterised some non-human animals as behaving more or less 'intelligently' in their own way. He also considered whether the human intellect may be similar to the workings of those non-corporeal entities which included the 'gods' and the apparently 'intelligent' agencies which directed the systematic processes of the heavens and governed the regularly ordered motions of the planets. Mediaeval thinkers tended to include the notion of 'angels' in this category of intelligent but non-human agents. Richard Feynman once remarked that the hypothesis of intelligent 'angels' controlling the movements of the planets was not necessarily misleading, given that we still don't fundamentally know how 'gravity' operates.

However, Aristotle would not have classified any physical machine as a living animal, in so far as it cannot feed itself or reproduce itself in the way that even the most primitive living beings can, and therefore in Aristotle's schema a computer or 'artificial intelligence' would necessarily be assigned to a different category from humans. If are we translate *psyche* into English as 'soul' it seems obviously inappropriate to regard a machine, a computer, an AI, as having a 'soul'. Yet as we shall see, the discussion in the *De anima* has cast a long shadow over such contemporary developments and issues.

In particular, one effect of Descartes' later categorising of 'thinking' as the exclusive activity of an immaterial 'soul' was to re-draw the distinction between humans and other living beings and to re-classify non-human 'animals' as in effect mechanisms. Aristotle's distinction between in-animate

objects and living animals, including humans and perhaps gods, was modified by Descartes's different classification of animals as wholly material and distinct from both humans and angels. Which was to cause problems for some religious believers when 'natural history' was reshaped around the notion of animal evolution

simplifications

.

Allow me some drastic simplifications. In the overall Aristotelian schema an entity, whether animate or inanimate, is regarded as constituted by what is termed 'form' and 'matter' (as we earlier considered in relation to Aristotle's thinking about 'economics'). The term 'material' is itself problematic. Put briefly, 'matter' (ὑλη, *hule*) is what can potentially be comprised or constituted in any specific entity, and should not be equated simply with physical matter, though in many contexts the term can be almost taken to mean the physical material of which an entity is made. This constitutive 'matter' was sometimes designated in mediaeval Latin as *materia scripta* and distinguished from 'primary matter', which was arguably what we would now call 'energy', that most elementary 'matter' which figures in Einstein's $E = mc^2$. Aristotle would undoubtedly have been intrigued by such recent notions as 'dark matter' or 'dark energy', as possible topics to consider in his 'physics' lectures.

The complementary term 'form' is notoriously more difficult to gloss. The Greek words which are now normally translated as 'form' include '*eidos*' (ειδοσ) which can be taken to mean an idea, image or concept, and '*morphe*' (μορφη) which is closer to such English words as shape, structure, organisation, arrangement, or even design. A 'form' can be regarded as what 'gives' some constitutive matter the shape, structure, or arrangement which makes the resulting composite of form and matter into what that entity is. In its simplest sense, for example, a statue might be made of bronze as its 'matter' while its 'form' or shape is what makes it recognisably a statue of, say, Venus. Another statue might be made from the same bronze which has been melted down and recast into a different shape, as a figure of Zeus. Another statue made of marble might have the same 'Venus' form but its matter would make it a different statue from the bronze Venus. In a series of mass-produced identical copies of bronze 'Venus' statues each has the same 'form' but is individualised by the different physical bronze or other physical matter in each instance, its own *materia scripta*. However, while a boat made of wood, fibreglass, or metal might have a shape which makes it look like a boat, a lump of granite shaped as a boat would not work as a boat (a sea-sick Empress of China commissioned a 'boat' made of stone which was permanently 'moored' on the Imperial Lake). A cathedral can incorporate or embody an overall architectural 'plan' though its precise overall form may be the result of several overlapping and co-ordinated designs, with the whole building constructed of multiple different materials.

And so on. The basic terminology is highly flexible. I can even appropriate some elements of the 'form' of a cathedral for the design of this book.

These obvious examples, however, concern objects made by humans, and their shape or arrangement, their 'form' or 'formal cause', can be attributed to their maker or designer, whose intention in making the object also provides a 'final cause', the end or aim for which the object is made. This is to think in terms of the implementation of an 'idea' which is 'realised' in the material object, as an 'artificial' or 'synthetic' (*συνθητίκος*) entity. In some respects, the 'idea' of a human-made object can be envisaged in terms of a plan, sketch, or outline, though the 'form' is not itself 'matter', even when depicted as a diagram drawn on material paper or displayed on a digital screen.

However, what of 'natural' *in*-animate material objects such as rocks or stones, mountains and rivers, which might have been given their present shape or 'form' not by any human or intentional intervention (though human input may partly contribute) but by a range of natural forces acting upon the material, a result partly produced by the physical impact of wind, rain, sea, etc., which act without any intentional 'final cause', though resulting in a specific combination of matter and form, as this rock, this lagoon, this island.

Aristotle might plausibly construe inanimate 'form' today in terms of chemical processes or inter-acting molecular structures analysable by appropriate scientific formulae and equations, such as 'H_2O' designating the 'form' or arrangement which constitutes water. One concern of Aristotle's *Physics* was to analyse the most basic parameters of natural objects and processes, including such problematic core concepts as 'change', 'place', 'time', 'motion' which pose issues in what we might now call theoretical physics. However, in most mundane contexts Aristotle's analytical terms have become sufficiently familiarised that 'matter' and 'form' can often be regarded as providing an almost common-sense terminology and we rarely stop to ask whether we actually understand their everyday use, and in particular what precisely we mean by the 'form' of an object.

But then how does a distinction between matter and form relate to animate entities, 'living' objects, where again there might seem to be no architect or designer, no prior plan. In the *De anima* the 'form' of a living entity is that which is constituted in and by the reproduction process itself, and the 'formal cause' is therefore also a 'final cause', in the sense that what the animal will 'naturally' develop into is what is implicit in its 'form', as this specific kind of animal, an instance of this particular species.

The 'form' of a walrus is what each walrus will come to be as a walrus: its 'form' as a living walrus is precisely to become a walrus, to develop into what it is to live as a walrus, and it is that specific way of being a walrus which is reproduced by walruses and only by walruses, each generated by its walrus progenitors.

In several treatises, including *De partis animalibus* and *De generatione animalium*, Aristotle considered in impressive detail how different species reproduce themselves, and his classificatory system once earned high praise from Linnaeus as pioneer anatomy and zoology. He made some major errors, for example mistakenly thinking that the evidence indicated that in the sexual reproduction of some animals the 'material' was primarily provided by the female and the 'form' was largely contributed by the male, though in other animals this was not the case. But his investigations of variously different modes of reproduction did not itself answer the question of what makes an animal a 'living' entity, different from both artificially made objects and inanimate natural things. What indeed is the *psyche* which 'animates'? And are we to think of the 'form' of an animal as its *psyche*, as what makes it alive?

The *De anima* argues that the 'material' of an animal cannot itself explain 'life', since the physical 'matter' of a recently dead animal is, initially at least, the very same matter as that of the living animal, and therefore the corporeal matter could not by itself make it a living animal. Moreover, to use the Scholastic term, the *materia scripta* is continually replaced by different matter, as energy or food is consumed, assimilated, and excreted, while the 'same' animal persists. What makes an animal living must therefore be its 'form', and it is the way in which the physical material is 'formed', or shaped and organised, which activates or animates that particular 'matter', gives it life, makes it alive as this animal. Nevertheless, without appropriate physical matter there would be nothing to organise, to animate, and the physical material must be such that it is able to be so animated, to be or become not just any animal but this particular kind or species of animal. A living animal cannot be made out of bronze or rock, and nor can an elephant be made out of a tadpole, or an eagle give birth to a pigeon, though it is possible to cross-breed some animals and some plants, as Aristotle and his colleague Theophrastus registered in the experiments of farmers and gardeners.

Hence the *De anima* makes it the first requirement of being a living entity that it is both able to feed on more 'matter' and to reproduce itself, its own form of matter, to become able to make a new entire plant or animal of its own species. In the act of reproduction it is the living parent(s) which transmit or generate a potentially living animal, both the 'matter' which will increase by its feeding on other matter and the 'form' which continues to structure that living process. When an animal dies the inanimate matter remains which, without its animating form, putrifies. The process of 'putrefaction' is discussed in the treatise *Metereologica* (Bk IV, 1) concerned with various basic physical processes. Aristotle mistakenly believed that putrefying dead matter could sometimes spontaneously generate very primitive forms of life, such as maggots, an hypothesis not experimentally disproven until the 17th century.

One interpretation of the *De anima* postulated that different living capacities were acquired cumulatively or progressively, in that an entity after

conception might successively grow into a sequence of additional 'forms', with an embryo changing through different stages of transformation from a vegetable form of life to an animal form. It was debated in some mediaeval treatises whether this meant that the human embryo began its existence in the womb as not even a 'vegetable' form of life, but only as 'potentially alive', since it was able to nourish itself before birth only in complete dependence upon its parent, while the growing embryo gradually acquired more capacities such as sensation and movement. This account envisaged a sequence of 'life-forms' supplementing or replacing each other, as the butterfly form might be regarded as replacing the caterpillar form, apparently trans-forming itself into a quite different corporeal organisation. For some thinkers an entity retained, and was finally composed of, a 'plurality of forms'. But this still did not clarify quite what a 'form' of 'life' is, or in what sense *psyche* is a cause of life.

In a kind of analogue, Aristotle perhaps surprisingly argues (412b 19) that if the eye were itself a complete living animal its *psyche*, regarded as its formal or final cause, would be 'sight'. Sight is a 'potential' of the eye, and the possibility of seeing is provided or enabled by its shape, its arrangement, its form. What has to be precisely arranged in a living eye is (in modern terms) the organisation of the lens, the retina, the optic nerve, as contained within the overall construction of the eyeball, and it is crucial to the operation of an eye that these components are in a precise relationship to each other.

It used to be the practice in English secondary schools that every pupil was obliged to dissect and analytically describe the eye of a dead cow. However, since a deceased 'cow' is now only 'meat', a dead eye is not an 'eye' of a cow though we can still refer to it equivocally as such. A dead eye no longer sees, even if light can still be shone onto the retina. Nor does a closed eye see, though dreams or memories can produce 'phantastmata'. The potential or capacity for sight has to be activated ('animated'?) by the actual action of seeing, and such seeing is not an activity of the eye alone but of the body as a whole, since the eye is not in fact an independent animal but a part of a whole animal. For seeing to occur, the physical eye has to be connected to the rest of the body through the optic nerves, various muscles, and so on, while there also has to be something to be seen and an appropriate medium in which to see. Physical damage or loss of eyes can make the whole animal blind, just as what 'happens' at death involves a loss of the entire living 'form' (*psyche*) while the remaining 'matter', the non-living corpse, is now shaped by a different form or forms, as physical processes of decay and dissolution trans-form the material remains into other compounds. When a living individual animal dies the material body no longer has the 'form' of a living being, any more than a dead eye is able to see.

This account might now be regarded as merely a loosely appropriate though somewhat abstract way of thinking about the 'animate' as distinct

from the inanimate. As in other areas, Aristotle's terminology has become almost commonsensical yet the problem of animate 'form' has remained in so far as the enigma of 'life' still remains. NASA considered some 180 different definitions of what would count as 'life' in any extra-terrestrial search and we still have no scientific consensus as to the origin of life even on this planet. (See for example Pier Luigi Luisi, *The Emergence of Life from Chemical Origins to Synthetic Biology*, 2016.)

At this point, the going gets tough and you may want to skip, or just ignore the Greek and Latin which are mainly important for clarifying why the terminology in the *De anima* caused several problems of interpretation and understanding. And why arguments about abortion are often incoherent.

'substantial form'

Aristotle's own approach to a tentative answer to 'what is life' arguably leads to an impasse, but one which still has ramifications. One attempted solution to these issues was the notion of the *psyche* or *anima* as itself a 'substantial form', that the *anima* is both a form and also itself a subsistent entity, a 'substance', even though in Aristotle's normal use of these terms this is almost a logical paradox. Since 'matter' cannot exist without a 'form' and a form has to be the form of some matter, does the *anima* therefore somehow have its own immaterial 'matter' distinct from the matter of the compound object of which it is the form.

At various points Aristotle's text struggles with its own terminology. It is impossible to disentangle all the complexities of interpretation here, but as a mere indication consider the following passages and their difficulties, including ambiguities.

Here is a fairly literal translation of 412a15, but I have added some of the Greek terms:

> Therefore every natural body sharing in life will be a substance [οὐσία], and this substance will be in some way composite. Since, however, it is a body of such and such a nature, i.e. having vitality, the *psyche* will not itself be the body [σῶμα]. For the body is not one of the factors existing in the subject [οὐ γάρ ἐστι τῶν καθ' ὑποκειμένου τὸ σῶμα]; rather, it is as the subject and the matter [ὑποκείμενον καὶ ὕλη]. It is necessary, then, that the *psyche* be a substance in the sense of the specifying principle [οὐσίαν εἶναι ὡς εἶδος σώματος] of a physical body potentially alive. Now, substance is act [ἡ δ' οὐσία ἐντελέχεια]; it will therefore be the act of a body of this sort.

Or as translated in the Loeb edition (with *psyche* replacing Loeb's misleading English 'soul'):

> Every natural body which possesses life must be substance and substance of the compound type. But since it is a body of a definite kind, that is having life, the body cannot be psyche for the body is not something predicated of the subject but rather is itself to be regarded as a subject, i.e., as matter. So the psyche must be substance in the sense of being the form of a natural body, which potentially has life. And substance in this sense is actuality. The psyche, then, is the actuality of the kind of body we have described

Does it help? Here is an attempt at translating another passage, 414b 10:

> Since 'that whereby we live and perceive' can mean two things,—like 'that by which we know', for we name one thing knowledge, and another, the psyche, though we are said to know by both of these; and likewise as 'that by which we are healthy'; for health is one thing, while a part of the body (or the whole of it) is another; and in these cases knowledge, or health, is the form and specific essence or ratio, and, as it were, the act [μορφὴ καὶ εἶδός τι καὶ λόγος καὶ οἷον ἐνέργεια] of such as can receive knowledge in the one case and health in the other (for the action of an agent seems to exist in the recipient or disposed material)—and psyche being that by which we primarily live and perceive and move and understand it follows that the psyche will be a sort of species or ratio; not, as it were, a matter or substratum [ὥστε λόγος τις ἂν εἴη καὶ εἶδος, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὕλη καὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον]. Substance [οὐσίας] is predicated in three ways, as we have said: in one way as the form [εἶδος]; in another as the matter [ὕλη]; and in another as what is from both. Of these, matter is the potency [ἡ μὲν ὕλη δύναμις], form the act [τὸ δὲ εἶδος ἐντελέχεια]; hence if what is from both is the animate being, the body is not the act of the psyche, but the psyche of the body [οὐ τὸ σῶμά ἐστιν ἐντελέχεια ψυχῆς, ἀλλ' αὕτη σώματός τινος].

The single compact phrase μορφὴ καὶ εἶδός τι καὶ λόγος καὶ οἷον ἐνέργεια τοῦ δεκτικοῦ brings together simply with the word 'and' a string of terms each of which can be understood in multiple ways: form, idea, principle or reason, act or even something like 'energeticness' or 'actualisation'.

And here is a short passage from Aquinas's extensive line-by-line commentary on the *De Anima* where he, like all commentators, is trying to decide how to translate and differentiate these various terms. First the Latin, with the technical terms in italics (Commentary #275)

> Quarto ibi, tripliciter enim dicta *substantia*, etc., ostendit conclusionem sequi ex praemissis. Non enim videbatur magis sequi de anima, *quod sit*

forma, quam de corpore, cum utroque vivere dicamur: unde ad perfectionem dictae demonstrationis, subiungit, quod cum *substantia* dicatur tripliciter, ut supra dictum est, scilicet de *materia, forma, et composito ex utrisque, quorum materia est potentia, et species sive forma est actus*, et compositum ex utrisque est animatum, manifestum est, quod *corpus non est actus animae*, sed magis *anima est actus corporis* alicuius: corpus enim est i*n potentia respectu animae.* Et ideo cum consequatur ex praedicta demonstratione, *quod vel corpus vel anima sit species*: et corpus, ut dictum est, non sit species animae, sequitur quod anima sit species corporis.

Then at [the passage beginning] 'Substance is predicated', he shows how this conclusion follows from the premises. For it might have seemed to follow that the body no less than the 'soul' was a form, since we call the body also a principle of life. So, to clinch the argument, he adds that if, as we have said, the term 'substance' can refer to three things, to matter, to form, and to the complex of both (the matter being the potential element; the form the actuality; and the complex the thing that is alive in this way) the body is clearly not the soul's actuality, but rather the soul is the body's; for the body is potential with respect to the soul. And if the foregoing argument has led us to the alternative that the specifying principle is either the soul or the body, we can now conclude that it is the soul; for it is now clear that the body is not the form of the soul.

At 414a15 Aristotle seems to imply that a 'form' cannot itself be a 'substance', any more than it can be matter or what underpinns a composite substance (λόγος τις ἂν εἴη καὶ εἶδος, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὕλη καὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον) and yet at one point he says the psyche is οὐσία γὰρ ἡ κατὰ τὸν λόγον. Which one translator rather desperately renders as 'It is 'substance' as definable form'.

Aquinas at # 236 of his commentary says that the *anima* is a substance which is a form which is a principle (*ratio*): 'Dictum est enim quod anima est substantia, quae est forma, a qua accipitur ratio rei.' The passage reads:

Dicit ergo primo, quod dictum est in universali quid sit anima, cum praedicta definitio omni animae conveniat. Est autem differentia inter formam quae est substantia, et formam quae non est substantia. Nam forma accidentalis, quae non est in genere substantiae, non pertinet ad essentiam sive quidditatem subiecti: non enim albedo est de essentia corporis albi. Sed forma substantialis est de essentia, sive de quidditate subiecti. Sic igitur anima dicitur forma substantialis, quia est de essentia sive de quidditate corporis animati. Et hoc est quod subdit, haec autem, scilicet substantia quae est secundum rationem est quod quid erat esse huic corpori, id est corpori constituto in specie per talem formam. Ipsa

> enim forma pertinet ad essentiam rei, quae significatur per definitionem significantem de re quid est.
>
> First, then, he observes that the definition given above is 'general', i.e. it applies to any anima / soul. It posits the soul as a substance, which is a form; and this means that it presents to us the idea of the essence of something. For there is this difference between a form that is substance and one that is not, that the latter sort are not strictly of the essence or 'whatness' of a thing: whiteness is not of the essence of a white body; whereas substantial form is essential and quidditative [makes it *thi*s, *quid*]. *To call the soul a substantial form,* therefore, is to imply that it is of the essence and 'whatness' of the body it animates. Hence he says 'this', i.e. this quidditative substance, 'is the essence of this body', i.e. of the body that is what it is precisely through having this particular form. For this form is essential to the thing, and is denoted by the definition of what the thing is.

I have italicised the crucial but deeply puzzling term 'substantial form'.

For mediaeval theologians and philosophers, though not for Aristotle himself, the notion of a 'substantial form' could at least be claimed as also referring to the peculiar ontological status of angels. However, the Latin term *forma substantialis* in Aquinas's gloss on Aristotle in this passage and in several other places is potentially and frustratingly ambiguous. It is seemingly used here almost to indicate a form which is itself a substance. Whereas the term would normally refer to a form which makes an entity to be a substance, a compound of form and matter constituting an entity, as distinct from a form which is 'accidental', here referring to a change which does not 'substantially' transform the entity into a different entity.

Socrates remains a man, and indeed this man, the same 'substantial entity', even if by an 'accidental' change his hair grows white or if he becomes crippled. But what if he loses the human capacity for thinking? Does he cease being Socrates? Or even cease being human? Is that a question about Alzheimer's or about angels? And when did Socrates acquire the form which makes an animal human? Or is that a wrong question? My own concern, however, is with an animal which thinks.

knowing & understanding

Which takes us back to the primary concern guiding this overall exploration prompted by thinking about Anselm. The several complexities concerning *anima* and *form* were directly entangled with the issue of 'thinking'. Aristotle's notion of 'intellect', he says, again relates analogically to that of sight, since in his view the act of seeing involves the transmission to the eye not the 'matter' of the seen object, but its 'form', an appearance, a shape, an image. In Aquinas's Latin terminology, what reaches the eye is a 'visible

species', here using the term 'species' as in Pecham's optics, not in the biological sense.

Similarly, the process of 'knowing' involves not the assimilation of the 'matter' of what is to be understood but the form of it, with the notion of an 'intelligible species' as analytically comparable to a 'visible species'. Put simply, 'understanding' initially involves grasping or assimilating not the 'matter' but the form, structure, or organisation, of an object of knowledge, an 'idea' (*eidos* – a term which can refer to both sight and understanding). In this approach, a capacity for 'thinking' comprises a structure of different stages or procedures, from acquiring knowledge, primarily or ultimately from the senses, then through the systematisation and organisation of that knowledge, by the selection, ordering, and arrangement of the abstracted 'intelligible species', upon the basis of which suppositions, hypotheses, and judgements can then be generated, and a 'thought' or act of understanding can be produced, or an assertion can be made.

Not surprisingly, a mediaeval model of these stages or functions of the 'intellect' closely matched the structured procedures of the Scholastic *quaestio* and directly echoes the relation of the three texts in the academic curriculum as outlined earlier: the *Glossa* as initial data-gathering or input, the *Sic et non* as preliminary organisation and weighing of evidences, the dialogical structure of the *quaestio* as the active intellect, generating decisions and conclusions.

Moreover, the 'content' or, in a different sense, 'matter' of a text is arguably itself 'non-material' since there can be different material instantiations of its 'form', for example as reproduced or copied in a spoken lecture, a dictated script, a manuscript, or memorised 'in the mind'. As those prolific writers Aristotle and Aquinas knew very well, an 'idea', its structure, its form, however complex, could be realised and repeated in different material embodiments.

Since a 'thought' on this account is itself non-material, 'the intellect' for mediaeval Aristotelians is not physically located in the same way as a physical organ is. An 'intelligible species' is not necessarily contained within a specific corporeal location since a 'content' can reside not only 'in' a text or in memory but 'in' a library, or in today's terms 'in' a database, the cloud, an external hard drive, and so on, since 'it' can now be trans-formed even into a series of digital ones and zeros, as 'in-form-ation'. Notions of thinking can change with new technologies or forms of transmission, storage, and reproduction. But a question for Aristotle or Aquinas about such technologies would have been whether an in-animate entity (a computer) could extract the 'intelligible form' of an object of inquiry yet nevertheless would not itself be characterised as 'knowing' or understanding that object.

To put the same point in a slightly different way, for Aristotle and Aquinas the process of 'understanding' itself constitutes a sequential formation of 'forms', not the physical assimilation of a material object.

Even if the senses provide the initial input, through registering the impact of material processes upon them, what intervenes between that physical input and the activity of the intellect is the 'intelligible species', usually also including 'phantastmata' or imaginings generated in the process of abstraction or de-materialisation. As seeing does not involve incorporating into the eye the matter of the object seen, but rather the 'form' of what is seen, so the process of knowing is concerned with the 'form' of what is to be understood, abstracting from the compound entity that form or 'formula' which, like a design or diagram, is not itself intrinsically material but an 'idea' analytically separable or abstractable from the 'matter' of the entity which is to be known. (This of course allows intermediate processes, including technological aids which transmit sensual or sensible information or enhance our own senses, or store and circulate intelligible species. The model is not solely of an individual's processes.)

Yet that is only an opening step in a more complex process of 'understanding'. One indicative problem, for example, which we earlier considered in relation to iconoclasm, would be how far the intellect can 'understand' a concept of 'God' without recourse to an 'image' of God (perhaps think here of Anselm's comment on painting), or in relation to a more recent dilemma, whether comprehending quantum theory can dispense entirely with any form of visualisation, as in variants of the Copenhagen interpretation.

The implication for Aristotle was that 'the intellect' is not similar to the physical sensory organs and is not itself physically material, neither made of matter nor itself a repository of matter, and since it is the 'forms' of objects which the intellect 'grasps' or 'contains', not the matter of which they are composed, the human *anima* is therefore itself characterised by a certain mode of 'non-materiality'.

The specifically human capacity for 'thinking' is therefore not 'located' corporeally in the way that sensory capacities are related to specific physical organs, such as sight in relation to the eye or hearing to the ear. This does not preclude there being a particular and necessary role to be played by the brain or the 'heart' or the 'mind' but indicates that thinking, like actually seeing, is an activity of the animal as a whole, since the specifically human *anima* animates the whole human including the bodily sense organs. Or, in the compact phrase used earlier, 'the body is clearly not the soul's actuality, but rather the soul is the body's actuality'. Even though, to quote a well known colophon on a manuscript: 'Though it is only the thumb and finger which writes, it is the whole body which aches.'

DNA

Various problem then arise as to whether the *anima* is itself a compound of 'form' and 'matter', which could entail an infinite regress, and whether the capacity of the immaterial *anima* to 'know' remains dependent nevertheless

upon the corporeal matter which provided its sensory input, or whether it is possible to envisage the persistence of some form of non-corporeal matter, even possibly a 'spiritual matter', which is independent of and can survive the death of the body's own corporeal matter. The Scholastic disputes multiplied. As indeed do today's neurological disputes.

Crucially for some mediaeval Christian thinkers, one interpretation of the *De anima* was that if the *psyche* is itself a 'substantial form', this implies the argument that the *anima* or 'soul' could therefore continue to exist without any ongoing corporeal instantiation. Aristotle had suggested that the particular kind of bodily senses, the eyes and ears we are familiar with, were not essential to all forms of intelligence, as in the possible case of the gods or perhaps the entities controlling the heavens. Nevertheless, the notion of a human form without a living human body was, according to the usual senses of 'matter' and 'form', almost unconceptualisable, a logical paradox. Various commentators therefore disputed whether Aristotle himself allowed the possibility of the post-mortem existence of an immaterial and perhaps therefore immortal human psyche. For some present-day Christian believers those mediaeval arguments continue.

Today, however, Aristotle himself might be most intrigued by the notion that it is the complex arrangement or 'form' of the DNA double helix and the patterns it varyingly (re)produces which enables the continuing transmission of 'life', of living material. It may no longer be terminologically appropriate to ask whether DNA is a 'substantial form' and we would not describe someone's DNA or an individual genome as a 'soul' in the popular fuzzily 'spiritual' sense of that term, but Aristotle today might well ask whether 'DNA' is itself a substance, a composite of matter and form, and how exactly a combination of amino acids is potentially 'alive'.

It might even be suggested that the discovery of DNA indicates very much the *kind* of answer which the *De anima* was trying to provide to the question 'what is life?' Our DNA is what makes each of us a human animal and a specific inheritance of DNA makes this body, this individual, identifiably different from any other human. And what is crucial to the transmission of DNA is the complex double strand, the 'form' into which the components are 'arranged'.

Aristotle might also be especially interested that it was an 'artificial intelligence' (Alphafold) which managed to analyse the fiendishly complex convoluted structures of the 20,000 or more proteins which provide the 'matter' of a living human body.

The argument of the *De anima* was primarily conceptual, and the core relation between 'matter' and 'form' can be regarded as an analytical differentiation or ontological distinction between material and structure, or energy and organisation, such that no energy can exist without being organised and no organisation can exist without energy. Which includes any living organism. The *De anima* poses or formulates questions and suggests a model without being able to provide related empirical answers. A few

thousand years later, it still remains unclear how one might answer such apparently simple questions as 'what is life?' and 'how does life originate?' However, even if DNA may now suggest a direction for an appropriate solution to Aristotelian questions about 'life' or 'psyche', the issue of 'intelligence' remains stubbornly enigmatic. Like his many successors, Aristotle encountered major conceptual difficulties when thinking about human intelligence. His mediaeval commentators faced even more difficulties.

after death

In the late mediaeval vacillating response to Aristotle's works (his works were condemned and banned a number of times) these philosophical issues were inevitably inflected by theological doctrines. For example, whether the specifically human *psyche* incorporated, replaced, or trans-formed 'preceding' stages or life-forms was an issue complicated by beliefs about the conception of Jesus himself in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and whether Christ had both a human and a divine '*psyche*' (a particularly unique 'plurality of forms'). That the dying Jesus 'gave up his soul' but then 'descended into hell' and was bodily resurrected three days later raised further difficulties, as did the very notion of any posthumous identity. There was also the issue of non-human intelligent beings for whom the constitutive 'matter' in question was non-corporeal, so did the absence in 'angels' of an individualising material body or corporeal means of reproduction entail that each angelic 'form' was created as wholly unique, each individual angel its own species, in some further sense of that term?

In his detailed line-by-line *Commentary* on the *De anima,* and in the *Summa contra gentiles* where much of Book II is directly in dialogue with the *De anima*, Thomas Aquinas attempted to reconcile the overall Aristotelian framework with Christian doctrines. The complexity and intricacy of the issues involved can be indicated by Aquinas's text known as *Disputed Questions on the Soul*, which runs to about 300 pages, comprises 21 'articles', and explores such questions as:

Article 1: whether the soul can be a form and a particular thing.
Article 2: whether the human soul so far as its act of existing is concerned is separated from the body.
Article 6: whether the soul is composed of matter and form.
Article 10: whether the soul exists in the whole body and in each of its parts.
Article 14: whether the human soul is incorruptible.
Article 15: whether the soul when separated from the body is capable of understanding.
Article 21: whether the soul when separated from the body can suffer punishment by corporeal fire.

Note that Article 10 might now be discussed in relation to DNA sampling and research into an individual's unique genome. Characteristically, Aquinas formulated a total of around 400 logical and other possible objections to the positions he himself argues for in these various *quaestiones*.

In particular, contrary to some interpretations of Aristotle, Aquinas argued that a human *anima* or *psyche* is necessarily and permanently associated with the specific 'matter' of that unique individual of which it is the 'form', so that even if the 'anima' survives the physical demise of the body, that *anima* is still the 'form' of that individual body, since it is essential to Aquinas's theological position that Christian belief requires not simply the after-life of a disembodied 'spirit' but the 'resurrection' of each individual body.

It was therefore especially important that each human person could somehow be individualised both with and 'without' their specific bodily matter, so that 'between' death and the resurrection of the body each separate individual could be conceived of as still uniquely existing. This belief was fundamental to the notion of 'souls' existing as individuals in purgatory, a doctrine which significantly underpinned the economy of, for example, Christ Church Cathedral. And it is this core concept we find taken for granted in the extensive use of 'soul' in Anselm's letters. Anselm had not, of course, read the *De anima* which was not translated into Latin until after his death, and his conception of a 'soul' was in effect still traditionally Platonist. Yet his way of 'thinking' indicated issues we have still not resolved.

Descartes

The difficulties of this entire set of issues were inherited and partly modified by the way in which Descartes reformulated the relation of 'matter' and 'mind'. His considerable simplifications marked the dissolution of an intellectual framework once partly shared by Aristotle and Aquinas, though Descartes might himself in some respects be regarded as the last Scholastic. Rather than trying to understand the 'form' of the 'matter' which constitutes the human body as the structure or organisation of the corporeal body itself, Descartes in effect inherited the highly problematic notion of a 'substantial form' and conceptualised the 'soul' as itself a wholly immaterial entity, a 'substance' essentially distinct from the body, not unlike the notion of an angel intrinsically able to exist without a body. Descartes' notion of the subject, the 'I' of the *cogito*, was then conflated with a concept of the 'mind' as immaterial and immortal. This was arguably an even less coherent residue of the attempted mediaeval reconciliation of incompatible Aristotelian and Christian positions. From that perspective, Descartes signals not so much an innovation as a reversion to aspects of an older Platonist tradition.

Following this simplified 'Cartesian' notion, for example, many Christians and other religious believers today, including recent 'pro-life' activists or anti-abortion legislators, would apparently insist that scientific biology is not the appropriate framework for the explanation or even exploration of the physical nature of human life, and particularly not for the issues they see as involved in the status of a human embryo.

One strand in much self-declared 'Christian' thinking is that 'God' somehow 'inserts' an immaterial 'soul' into the embryo, though at what precise stage he intervenes in its origination or development is disputed. Such positions in effect recapitulate conclusions or suppositions traceable in and to mediaeval arguments, but often without a corresponding attempt at any philosophical or conceptual analysis to support the notion that, for example, even before conception an individual 'soul' is somehow in effect a separate 'substance' in its own right. Indeed, the material human body can be regarded by some, in an even more quasi-Platonist mode, as that which constrains, restricts, or even imprisons the 'soul'. What, incidentally, was the status of the foetus or DNA implanted at the Annunciation, if any such Christians still believe in the incarnation.

A shift from understanding *psyche* as the specific organisation of a particular biological life-form to notions of the 'soul' as an immaterial entity wholly separable from the body has also considerably influenced the formulation of some philosophical issues concerning 'thinking' and 'intelligence', generating what can seem intractable conceptual problems, not least in relation to the so-called mind-body relation. Though thankfully so far debates about 'artificial intelligence' have not yet been subjected to neo-Christian objections.

Nevertheless, prevailing quasi-Cartesian presuppositions have arguably fostered a framework in which some neuroscience investigations have regarded 'thinking' as an inward, individual, and 'mental' activity, even if terms such as 'soul' and 'spirit' are professionally avoided. For reasons which will become clearer, I would characterise such a notion as the 'Yorick' model of intelligence.

Aristotle's approach had been shaped by a 'natural history' framework, partly based upon considerable empirical investigation of animal species. Descartes's philosophy re-drew the dividing line between the human, regarded as essentially a thinking subject or spirit, and other 'animals' which were effectively relocated into the same category as wholly material entities, both living and inanimate. The implications of this for responses to a development of natural history in evolutionary terms were considerable, not least amongst Christian believers.

Descartes' account or adaptation of what he regarded as Anselm's 'ontological' argument was a central and symptomatic instance of Descartes's approach. It was probably the most influential version in the 17th century and directly contributed to a mode of post-mediaeval philosophical thinking. Unlike the earlier Scholastic or more recent

symbolic logic versions, Descartes' reworking of Anselm's argument was not initially offered as a schematic sequence of logically-linked propositions, which Descartes himself called 'the synthetic method', but rather as a first-person narrative which attempted by introspection and reflexive description to clarify his own process of thinking. He later attempted to offer schematic 'arguments demonstrating the existence of God', in his *Reply to Objections II*, explicitly formulated 'in the synthetic style'. But the following excerpt from his *Meditations* (a title itself somewhat reminiscent of Anselm's work) is written in what Descartes called the 'specially selected . . style of writing' which he claimed would 'best secure' the 'singular attention on the part of . . readers' which he required. The core passages which interest me are quoted from the *Fifth Meditation* (as translated by H. A. P. Torrey, slightly modified):

> … now, if from the simple fact that I can draw from my thought the idea of anything, it follows that all that I recognise clearly and distinctly to pertain to this thing pertains to it in reality, can I not draw from this an argument and a demonstration of the existence of God? It is certain that I do not find in me the less the idea of him, that is, of a being supremely perfect, than that of any figure or of any number whatever; and I do not know less clearly and distinctly that an actual and eternal existence belongs to his nature than I know that all that I can demonstrate of any figure or of any number belongs truly to the nature of that figure or that number: and accordingly, although all that I have concluded in the preceding meditations may not turn out to be true, the existence of God ought to pass in my mind as being at least as certain as I have up to this time regarded the truths of mathematics to be, which have to do only with numbers and figures: although, indeed, that might not seem at first to be perfectly evident, but might appear to have some appearance of sophistry.

This procedure or formulation is obviously different from Anselm's own, though he too was claiming to record a successful thinking process. However, as the account continues it is unclear how Descartes might 'easily persuade himself' or in what sense he thought 'more attentively' (my emphasis):

> For being accustomed in all other things to make a distinction between existence and essence, *I easily persuade myself* that existence may perhaps be separated from the essence of God, and thus God might be conceived as not existent actually. But nevertheless, *when I think more attentively*, I find that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than the essence of a rectilinear triangle can be separated from the equality of its three angles to two right angles, or, indeed, if you please, the idea of a mountain from the idea of a valley;

> so that there would be no less contradiction in conceiving of a God – that is, of a being supremely perfect, to whom existence was wanting, that is to say, to whom there was wanting any perfection – than in conceiving of a mountain which had no valley.

Descartes here presents himself as trying to arrive at a clear and distinct idea of God akin to the clear and distinct idea he has of a mathematical number or a geometrical figure. But he then hesitates:

> Although, in reality, I might not be able to conceive of a God without existence, no more than of a mountain without a valley, nevertheless, as from the simple fact that I conceive a mountain with a valley, it does not follow that there exists any mountain in the world, so likewise, although I conceive God as existent, it does not follow, it seems, from that, that God exists, for my thought does not impose any necessity on things; and as there is nothing to prevent my imagining a winged horse, although there is none which has wings, so I might, perhaps, be able to attribute existence to God, although there might not be any God which existed.

After thus offering what is effectively a version of Gaunilo's critique of Anselm, Descartes then presents himself as pausing, to consider whether his thinking has somehow gone astray:

> So far from this being so, it is just here under the appearance of this objection that a sophism lies hid. For from the fact that I cannot conceive a mountain without a valley, it does not follow that there exists in the world any mountain or any valley, but solely that the mountain and the valley, whether they exist or not, are inseparable from one another. Whereas from the fact alone that *I cannot conceive God except as existent,* it follows that existence is inseparable from him, and, consequently, that he exists in reality; not that my thought can make it to be so, or that it can impose any necessity upon things; but on the contrary the necessity which is in the thing itself, that is to say, *the necessity of the existence of God, determines me to have this thought.* For it is not at my will to conceive of a God without existence, that is to say, a being supremely perfect without a supreme perfection, as it is at my will to conceive a horse with wings or without wings.

According to this account, is it Descartes' own thought, his active work of 'thinking', that is leading him on in this argument, or is 'this thought' somehow inescapable, a quasi-logical necessity, requiring only that he somehow grasp it? And does the same therefore apply to the reader of Descartes' text? Must we 'necessarily' follow this route, this particular sequential process of thinking, or could we, for example, have short-

circuited the argument by some other process, or even by a sudden comprehension or instant insight? Descartes continues:

> . . It must not be said here that it is necessarily true that I should affirm that God exists, after I have supposed him to possess all kinds of perfection, since existence is one of these, but that my first supposition is not necessary, no more than it is necessary to affirm that all figures of four sides may be inscribed in the circle, but that, supposing I had this thought, I should be constrained to admit that the rhombus can be inscribed there, since it is a figure of four sides, and thus I should be constrained to admit something false. One ought not, I say, to allege this; for *although it may not be necessary that I should ever fall to thinking about God,* nevertheless, when it happens that I think upon a being first and supreme, and draw, so to speak, the idea of him from the store-house of mind, it is necessary that I attribute to him every sort of perfection, although I may not go on to enumerate them all, and give attention to each one in particular. And this necessity is sufficient to bring it about (as soon as I recognise that I should next conclude that existence is a perfection) that this first and supreme being exists: while, just as it is not necessary that I ever imagine a triangle, but whenever I choose to consider a rectilinear figure, composed solely of three angles, it is absolutely necessary that I attribute to it all the things which serve for the conclusion that their three angles are not greater than two right angles, although, perhaps, I did not then consider this in particular.

Despite his emphasis upon clear and distinct ideas, the process of thinking which Descartes here recounts is itself far from clear. The trajectory of his thought is presented as an inward process upon which he has to reflect but which he cannot wholly describe. If one were to ask Descartes to clarify further what happened in those moments when, as he says, 'I easily persuade myself' and 'I think more attentively', what would he be able to say? What more detailed account could he provide? Could he offer additional autobiographical steps in the process he is describing, or would he arrive at a point at which he could simply claim to have suddenly acquired a clear and distinct idea, somewhat like grasping the definition of a triangle – and perhaps in that respect not dissimilar to Anselm's own assertion of a sudden illumination.

Note that Descartes claims that it was not 'necessary' that he should ever 'fall to thinking about God' at all. If however he then pursued the further question of why he did so 'fall to thinking' about God, what kind of answer would he provide? Would it involve extending his first-person account further back to include, for example, his educational upbringing, his being taught basic mathematics and the French and Latin languages in which he uses the very terms 'Dieu' and 'deus'? Should he indeed have also included a consideration of his extensive reading, his many conversations, his

previous writings, as all variously bearing upon and contributing to his present account and explaining why he did so 'fall to thinking' about God? Thinking about the term 'God' may not have been 'necessary' – but it was surely unavoidable for an educated philosopher in 17th-century Catholic France. His 'thinking' was enmeshed within an entire culture and period. He claims to 'draw, so to speak, the idea of him from the store-house of mind' but the terms in which he proposes this position are obviously drawn at least from the very languages in which he writes of them. So is the Latin or French language 'the store-house of mind' and if so where is this storehouse?

As is clear from these passages, however, Descartes regarded 'thinking' as an individual and inward process, a matter of having clear and distinct 'ideas', which he might formulate to some extent in language, but only to recount his memory of his process of 'thinking' to his readers. This notion of 'clear and distinct ideas' might be regarded as only a version of the claim that some words can be clearly defined, so that, as with the term 'triangle', he is primarily unpacking the common definition or use of a word, including that word which figures in Aquinas's phrase 'what we call God', rather as 'I exist' is an unpacking of what is already included in the Latin verb *cogito*, 'I think'. Indeed, Descartes' (in)famous '*cogito ergo sum*' (I think therefore I am) might well be regarded as itself a compressed version of an 'ontological proof' even less persuasive as an argument than Anselm's own, from which Descartes attempted to 'prove' his own existence.

Yet if 'thinking' is basically the activity of an individual probing their own 'inward' processes, then the next step in Descartes' autobiographical account could have been to probe further 'inwards', to see what was happening 'in' his physical brain and how his thinking was occurring in relation to processes 'inside' his individual head. This was after all a characteristic 17th-century procedure of 'zooming closer' as a way of arriving at a more complete truth about a phenomenon, as with those near-contemporary inventions, a micro-scope enlarging a louse, as in the *Micrographia*, or a telescope focusing on a distant planet. Should Descartes, as it were, lift off the lid of his own skull and peer inside to see if he can further describe what is happening 'inside' even as he 'thinks'? However, would any such continuation of his autobiographical account then have to be couched in a quite different mode of writing, no longer a first-person subjective reflection from the 'inside' but a third-person description from the 'outside', observing and recounting the workings of his brain as an objective process not as a subjective experience?

However, Descartes himself elsewhere draws an absolute distinction between the body as extended, as material, and the mind as non-extended and immaterial. If Descartes were required to fill in the descriptive gaps in his claim that he at some point thought 'more deeply' or 'more attentively' (as in the passages above) would he eventually have to end up describing the relationship between what for him are the irreconcilably different

domains of 'the mind' and 'the body'? Descartes endorsed a radical dichotomy between a non-spatial, mental and immaterial mind, and the body as extended physical matter. The problem with this dichotomisation of domains conceived of as separate entities is how then to connect them, and in particular how far a 'material' body can cause 'mental' events, or vice versa. For some of Descartes' followers this might be posed in terms of whether corporeal matter itself could in some sense 'think'? Was 'thinking matter' possible? (See for example *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, by John W Yolton, 1984.) But then, if the related notion of an immaterial 'soul' was itself questioned or rejected, the problem for some Christian believers was again how an individual 'mind' could survive when separated from the body.

A Cartesian notion of the individual soul or mind as what constitutes our unique identity as a 'person' not only still implicitly underpins widespread 'common sense' notions about 'thinking' but for much of the 19th and 20th centuries the basic notion of 'thinking' operative in standard scientific experiments often seemed to have a clear affinity with that of Descartes, and was defined as a process essentially both inward and individual. (See for example *Nineteenth Century Origins of Neuroscientific Concepts* by Edwin Clark and L. S. Jacyna, 1987, and *On the Origins of Cognitive Science* by Jean-Pierre Dupuy, 2009.) A basic Cartesian position still arguably shapes the framework of some modern neuroscientific research, even though neuroscientists tend to avoid such terms as 'spirit' or 'soul', or even 'immaterial'. And now the Cartesian problem of the relationship between the mind and body has also become the problem of the relation between 'artificial intelligence' and computer engineering.

automata

I can here quote almost without comment a lengthy passage from Descartes's *The Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, which he claims partly consists of a summary of the comprehensive treatise which he had decided not to publish in the wake of the condemnation of Galileo. This long account, which may be unfamiliar enough to be interesting, at one point uses the phrase 'common sense' (*sensus communis*) in a quasi-scholastic technical sense but the argument as a whole anticipates a familiar 'common sense' position or attitude which still obtains concerning what Descartes called *automata* but today could include 'artificial intelligence'.

In part V of the *Discourse* he claims: 'I had explained all these matters in some detail in the treatise which I formerly intended to publish' and he continues (as translated by John Veitch,. published in 1912; see also Haldane and Ross, *Works* I, pp 116f):

I had expounded all these matters with sufficient minuteness in the treatise which I formerly thought of publishing. And after these, I had shown what must be the fabric of the nerves and muscles of the human body to give the animal spirits contained in it the power to move the members, as when we see heads shortly after they have been struck off still move and bite the earth, although no longer animated; what changes must take place in the brain to produce waking, sleep, and dreams; how light, sounds, odours, tastes, heat, and all the other qualities of external objects impress it with different ideas by means of the senses; how hunger, thirst, and the other internal affections can likewise impress upon it divers ideas; what must be understood by the common sense (*sensus communis*) in which these ideas are received, by the memory which retains them, by the fantasy which can change them in various ways, and out of them compose new ideas, and which, by the same means, distributing the animal spirits through the muscles, can cause the members of such a body to move in as many different ways, and in a manner as suited, whether to the objects that are presented to its senses or to its internal affections, as can take place in our own case apart from the guidance of the will.

Nor will this appear at all strange to those who are acquainted with the variety of movements performed by the different *automata*, or moving machines fabricated by human industry, and that with the help of but few pieces compared with the great multitude of bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins, and other parts that are found in the body of each animal. Such persons will look upon this body as a machine made by the hands of God, which is incomparably better arranged, and adequate to movements more admirable than is any machine of human invention.

And here I specially stayed to show that, were there such machines exactly resembling in organs and outward form an ape or any other irrational animal, we could have no means of knowing that they were in any respect of a different nature from these animals; but if there were machines bearing the image of our bodies, and capable of imitating our actions as far as it is morally possible, there would still remain two most certain tests whereby to know that they were not therefore really men.

Of these the first is that they could never use words or other signs arranged in such a manner as is competent to us in order to declare our thoughts to others: for we may easily conceive a machine to be so constructed that it emits vocables, and even that it emits some correspondent to the action upon it of external objects which cause a change in its organs; for example, if touched in a particular place it may demand what we wish to say to it; if in another it may cry out that it is hurt, and such like; but not that it should arrange them variously so as appositely to reply to what is said in its presence, as men of the lowest grade of intellect can do.

The second test is, that although such machines might execute many things with equal or perhaps greater perfection than any of us, they would, without doubt, fail in certain others from which it could be discovered that they did not act from knowledge, but solely from the disposition of their organs: for while reason is an universal instrument that is alike available on every occasion, these organs, on the contrary, need a particular arrangement for each particular action; whence it must be morally impossible that there should exist in any machine a diversity of organs sufficient to enable it to act in all the occurrences of life, in the way in which our reason enables us to act.

Again, by means of these two tests we may likewise know the difference between men and brutes. For it is highly deserving of remark, that there are no men so dull and stupid, not even idiots, as to be incapable of joining together different words, and thereby constructing a declaration by which to make their thoughts understood; and that on the other hand, there is no other animal, however perfect or happily circumstanced, which can do the like.

Nor does this inability arise from want of organs: for we observe that magpies and parrots can utter words like ourselves, and are yet unable to speak as we do, that is, so as to show that they understand what they say; in place of which men born deaf and dumb, and thus not less, but rather more than the brutes, destitute of the organs which others use in speaking, are in the habit of spontaneously inventing certain signs by which they discover their thoughts to those who, being usually in their company, have leisure to learn their language.

And this proves not only that the brutes have less reason than man, but that they have none at all: for we see that very little is required to enable a person to speak; and since a certain inequality of capacity is observable among animals of the same species, as well as among men, and since some are more capable of being instructed than others, it is incredible that the most perfect ape or parrot of its species, should not in this be equal to the most stupid infant of its kind, or at least to one that was crack-brained, unless the soul of brutes were of a nature wholly different from ours, and we ought not to confound speech with the natural movements which indicate the passions, and can be imitated by machines as well as manifested by animals; nor must it be thought with certain of the ancients, that the brutes speak, although we do not understand their language. For if such were the case, since they are endowed with many organs analogous to ours, they could as easily communicate their thoughts to us as to their fellows.

It is also very worthy of remark, that, though there are many animals which manifest more industry than we in certain of their actions, the same animals are yet observed to show none at all in many others: so that the circumstance that they do better than we does not prove that they are endowed with mind, for it would thence follow that they

possessed greater reason than any of us, and could surpass us in all things; on the contrary, it rather proves that they are destitute of reason, and that it is nature which acts in them according to the disposition of their organs: thus it is seen, that a clock composed only of wheels and weights can number the hours and measure time more exactly than we with all our skill.

I had after this described the reasonable soul, and shown that it could by no means be educed from the power of matter, as the other things of which I had spoken, but that it must be expressly created; and that it is not sufficient that it be lodged in the human body exactly like a pilot in a ship, unless perhaps to move its members, but that it is necessary for it to be joined and united more closely to the body, in order to have sensations and appetites similar to ours, and thus constitute a real man.

I here entered, in conclusion, upon the subject of the soul at considerable length, because it is of the greatest moment: for after the error of those who deny the existence of God, an error which I think I have already sufficiently refuted, there is none that is more powerful in leading feeble minds astray from the straight path of virtue than the supposition that the soul of the brutes is of the same nature with our own; and consequently that after this life we have nothing to hope for or fear, more than flies and ants; in place of which, when we know how far they differ, we much better comprehend the reasons which establish that the soul is of a nature wholly independent of the body, and that consequently it is not liable to die with the latter; and, finally, because no other causes are observed capable of destroying it, we are naturally led thence to judge that it is immortal.

Of course, in constantly referring his reader to a detailed exposition elsewhere in an inaccessible treatise which was never published and probably not even fully composed, Descartes is deploying a device noticeably similar to that in the *Meditations* passage, of claiming to have somehow thought 'more intensively' or more reflexively in order to arrive at the steps in his argument. The device of referring to an unpublished treatise is itself a variation upon constructing a 'literary conversion' to impress and persuade the sympathetically willing and credulous reader.

brain work

In my pursuit of 'thinking', this seems as appropriate a moment as any to dip, however inadequately, into some modern research into the workings of a brain, in part to illustrate a contemporary neuro-scientific mode but also arguably still a basically Cartesian way of approaching the notion of 'thinking'. There are several shelves and indeed libraries full of more or less accessible accounts to draw upon, from, say, A.R. Luria's classic *The Working Brain* (1973) through *Consciousness and the Brain* by Stanislas Dehaene

(2014) to more recent exposition such as *The Idea of The Brain* by Matthew Cobb (2020), *Being You: A New Science of Consciousness* by Anil Seth (2021), or *A Thousand Brains: a new theory of intelligence* by Jeff Hawkins (2021).

Since the territory is crowded and will undoubtedly be more far familiar to some readers than to myself, I will simply indicate work I happen to have found useful and factually informative.

I want to begin by considering the neuron as one focus in the current understanding of the workings of the brain, and will initially cite and summarise part of the account in *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and The Power of Mental Force* by Jeffrey M Schwartz and Sharon Begley (2002). Other and more recent accounts are easily available.

'A neuron in the brain consists, typically, of the cell body called the soma – Greek for 'body' – which measures 10 to 100 μm across (100 μm equals 0.1 mm)' (page 103f). Inside the soma occur the metabolising processes and the synthesising of proteins which constitute the essential activity of all living cells. From each soma sprout numerous tentacles, called dendrites, which divide into dozens or hundreds of branch points, and which receive incoming electro-chemical impulses from other neurons.

From each cell soma a single long fibre, called an axon, also emerges which extends away from the cell body and transmits electrical currents to the dendrites of other neurons. An axon can be as long as a metre, or only a few tenths of a millimetre, enabling connections between local or relatively distant areas of the brain. 'Information transmitted by one neuron and received by another takes the form of electrical signals generated by charged atoms, or ions – in particular, positively charged sodium and potassium ions or negatively charged chloride ions. The flux of ions across the cell membrane of a neuron is meticulously regulated by membrane pumps to give the inside of the cell a net negative charge relative to its surroundings. Rapid changes in the flux of ions can generate a moving pulse of electric charge called an action potential. Like a bulge zipping down a jump rope, the action potential speeds down the axon at up to 200 miles an hour in vertebrates (though only 30 to 40 miles an hour in invertebrates). It is the physical embodiment of the information sent from one neuron to another' (p.104f).

The connection point between a dendrite from one neuron and an axon from a different neuron is termed a 'synapse', which is a gap one millionth of a centimetre between them, across which there can occur an activation of responses between the two fibres which we can construe as the transmission of a 'signal'. Further: 'When the pulse of charge arrives at the synapse, it stimulates the entry of calcium ions, which triggers the process by which . . tiny vesicles in the presynaptic neuron release neurotransmitters' (p.105). These neurotransmitters can take the form of, for example, molecules of amino acid derivatives or nitric oxide gas. On average, a single brain neuron forms about 1,000 synaptic connections and receives about 10,000 inputs, with some cells in the cerebellum receiving up

to 100,000. Taking a conservative mean for the number of connections (1,000), the adult brain has an estimated 100 trillion synapsese. Other estimates of the number of synapsese in the adult brain suggest 1000 trillion (p.111).

We can now focus on what particularly concerns me. The process of making neural connection begins early. At birth a human newborn's brain contains some 100 billion nerve cells, and from about three weeks after conception the embryo has produced neurons, with some 250,000 per minute averaged over the entire nine months in utero. But:

> The fetal brain is profligate in its overproduction of both neurons and synapses. Not all the axons trying to reach out and touch another will manage it; the failures die. About half the neurons that form in the foetal brain died before the baby is born: 200 billion neurons, give or take, are reduced to the hundred billion of a newborn as neurons that fail to form functional synapses vanish. . . Synapses are pruned even more ruthlessly . . By one count, each cortical neuron forms, at the height of synapsogenesis, 15,000 connections: that works out to 1.8 million synapsese per second from the second month in utero to the child's second birthday. Which synapsese remain, and which wither away, depends on whether they carry any traffic. If they do not, then like bus routes that attract no customers, they go out of business. By one estimate, approximately 20,000,000,000 synapsese are pruned every day between childhood and early adolescence. It is survival of the busiest. (p. 117).]

All this seems a long way from both Aristotle's 'substantial form' and 17th-century 'thinking matter', but also from claims about 'inserting' a pre-existing 'soul'. However, consider this passage :

> Starting in the second trimester of pregnancy . . proto-neurons immediately begin to migrate outward in a journey so challenging that it has been likened to a baby's crawling from New York to Seattle and winding up in the precise neighbourhood, on the right street, at the correct house that he was destined for from the moment he left Manhattan. . . How neurons realise that they have reached the final destination remains a mystery. . . But we do know that it is only when the immature neurons are in place that they become fully fledged neurons and put down roots, blossoming with dendrites and spouting an axon by which they will communicate with, and form a circuit with, other neurons near and far.

One way to indicate the implications of such an account would be to ask whether Descartes should have pursued any full autobiographical 'inward' description of his own processes of thinking all the way back into the

womb itself. Perhaps those gaps in his narrative of insights were ultimately thanks to some dead or missing neurons or perhaps pruned synapses.

What particularly interests me is that the image of the neuron crawling 'from New York to Seattle' derives from one long-established and influential way of modelling the way in which the human brain operates, which was to try to 'map' the parts of the brain which seemed to be associated with different functions, actions, or skills.

In one sense, this could be seen as trying to explain the working of the brain in terms of its structure or arrangement, with the overall 'form' and the finally settled relations between 'locations' as the decisive factor in the differentiation of particular neuronal functions. The developed brain was regarded and presented in terms of a wonderfully intricate geography, a complex terrain comprising various more or less distinct 'areas' somehow responsible for hearing or vision, language or 'reasoning'. Between these areas could be traced major highways and numerous subsidiary routes which, like an urban traffic or city Metro diagram, indicated possible 'journeys', as of electro-chemical impulses carrying 'signals'. By taking EEG readings and MRI scans, experiments were increasingly successful in mapping apparent functional areas within a brain's overall structure, yet without explaining how that overall structure in some way 'causes' or relates to those functions.

Two vast 'Brain Projects' in Europe and America amounted to trying to reconstruct an entire model brain, as a map of itself (see *The Future Brain* edited by Gary Marcus and Jeremy Freeman, 2015). A rather Borgesean idea, the map being as detailed as the terrain. Both projects were eventually regarded as unsuccessful but left behind an array of tools and data which at least helped to postpone the problem indefinitely, since even a complete 'mapping' of the brain will not necessarily help until we understand better whether and how the very model of 'mapping' applies to the brain.

In an indirect lineage from Aristotle's lagoon, numerous investigations have learned a lot about the brains of frogs, flies, rats, maggots, and monkeys, and numerous practical medical uses have been developed from observing and modifying those brain processes which are observable and experimentally repeatable. Yet sending an electrical impulse to a prosthetic leg or stimulating specific brain cells to activate a computer's artificial speech system still seem to require a mode of explanation of a different order: how a 'voluntary' movement or a new 'thought' is generated in the first place, if indeed there is such a 'place'. But as far as specifically human 'thinking' is concerned no consensus hypothesis or even agreed formulation of the 'problem' has decisively emerged. Where is 'thinking'? And what is 'it'?

In the crucial business of securing funding for research programmes the relative technological availability of the procedures for localised 'mapping' of specific areas of the brain meant that as microscopic resolution vastly improved, some research focussed upon ever more localised areas and

eventually on the workings of individual neurons. Using a variety of techniques, one study demonstrated that a single cell in a specific individual male subject's brain fired up only and consistently on his seeing an image of a particular female television star. A Max Planck Institute study of a minute block of mouse brain less than one 10th of a millimetre on each side indicated a staggering total of 153,171 synapses involving just the 89 neurons in that space, out of the perhaps 70 million neurons in the whole of a mouse brain.

Such microscopic focus could partly displace or compete with research interest in what kinds of activity and connection can be tracked between parts of the brain. Were those 'locations' simply traffic roundabouts and switch-points or did the vastly complex reconfigurations of innumerable neurons themselves somehow process the 'information' (what is 'information'?) delivered to and through them. Part of the illuminating emphasis of the Schwartz and Begley study was upon precisely the *plasticity* of the human brain, its capacity to adapt different 'areas' to undertake new or modified functions, for example in the case of injury or a stroke.

The overall 'mapping' approach was supplemented by an increasing attention on how the 'journeys' themselves might construct or constitute changing configurations of multiply-connected neurons, suggesting that the networks of connections themselves might be regarded as defining the relevant 'areas', with brain functions related to the complex circuits connecting neurons rather than the 'areas' so connected. Such 'network' configurations could be variously observed as both a temporary 'flickering' (Doug Hofstadter's term) and as more lasting flexible re-apportionings of functions, a kind of constant 'neuro-plasticity'.

Within this model or approach 'neural networks' consisted not so much of journeys between fixed brain areas, but rather as combinations of neural connections which were not necessarily permanently traceable but could themselves be seen as the result of more or less momentary or temporary combined activations of a 'population' of more or less distant neurons, with connections being flexibly made and unmade, somewhat like Homer's Penelope endlessly weaving and unweaving her textiles. Or perhaps like the changing configurations of lighting arrangements in a theatre during the course of a performance. Or even the constantly re-organised patterns of the playing positions of a football team during an actual game.

This neural net 'connectionist' model suggested quite other metaphors or models than that of a fixed or stable cartography, including in particular images or models implicitly drawn from the momentary bricolage of global inter-net connections constantly constituted by myriads of users clicking on sequences of hyperlinks and thereby connecting them in constantly changing ways to a world-wide-web. It was perhaps such more or less momentary reconfigurations which constituted the substance of the brain's activity. But one might then be tempted to ask whether the 'world wide web' itself might 'think' – a vast 'thinking machine' though barely

approaching the scale of connections found in a normal human brain. Except that what the web connects are presumably already thinking entities, including the humans who have so far created it.

Leibniz

At this point there is a temptation to enter the rabbit hole of inconclusive debates about 'consciousness'. Instead I want briefly to consider another 17th-century figure who offered a version of Anselm's 'ontological proof'. In a passage where he refers to Anselm's argument, Leibniz in fact discusses Descartes' version (*New Essays Concerning Human Understanding,* translated by A.G. Langley, 1896, p. 502 ff.):

> Although I am for innate ideas, and in particular for that of God, I do not think that the demonstrations of the Cartesians drawn from the idea of God are perfect. . . what Descartes has borrowed from Anselm, Arch-bishop of Canterbury, is very beautiful and really very ingenious, but . . there is still a gap therein to be filled. This celebrated archbishop, who was without doubt one of the most able men of his time, congratulates himself, not without reason, for having discovered a means of proving the existence of God *a priori,* by means of its own notion, without recourse to its effects.

Leibniz then offered his own misleadingly succinct version:

> This is very nearly the force of his argument: God is the greatest or (as Descartes says) the most perfect of beings, or rather a being of supreme grandeur and perfection, including all degrees thereof. That is the notion of God. See now how existence follows from this notion. To exist is something more than not to exist, or rather, existence adds a degree to grandeur and perfection, and as Descartes states it, existence is itself a perfection. Therefore this degree of grandeur and perfection, or rather this perfection which consists in existence, is in this supreme all-great, all-perfect being: for otherwise some degree would be wanting to it, contrary to its definition. Consequently this supreme being exists.

Leibniz judges the argument cogent but defective, with missing steps ('there is still a gap therein'), and 'imperfect' but he doesn't attempt in this passage either to refute it or to resolve its difficulties, instead proposing that 'clever men' should pursue his own suggestions and 'achieve the demonstration with the strictness of a mathematical proof':

> The Scholastics, not excepting even their Doctor Angelicus, have misunderstood this argument, and have taken it as a paralogism; in which respect they were altogether wrong, and Descartes, who studied

> quite a long time the scholastic philosophy at the Jesuit College of La Fleche, had great reason for re-establishing it. It is not a paralogism, but it is an imperfect demonstration, which assumes something that must still be proved in order to render it mathematically evident; that is, it is tacitly assumed that this idea of the all-great or all-perfect being is possible, and implies no contradiction. And it is already something that by this remark it is proved that, assuming that God is possible, he exists, which is the privilege of divinity alone. . . But it is to be desired, nevertheless, that clever men achieve the demonstration with the strictness of a mathematical proof, and I think I have elsewhere said something that may serve this end.

These comments indicate a much larger project which Leibniz envisaged and in part initiated. The underlying ambition was in effect to regard all philosophical arguments and, indeed, all human thinking as susceptible to assessment by the protocols and criteria of mathematical procedures. Correct thinking was ultimately logical and logic was ultimately mathematical, and vice versa. A persistent ambition to systematise the relation between mathematics and logic could be traced from Leibniz through Frege, Bertrand Russell (who wrote a substantial book on Leibniz), and Wittgenstein's seminars on the philosophy of mathematics in the 1930s (in which Alan Turing participated).

Boole

George Boole's 1854 publication *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought on which are Founded the Mathematical Theories of Logic and Probabilities* can provide a succinct and accessible formulation of this tendency and pursuit. Boole wrote (I have italicised some phrases I later want to cite):

> The conditions of valid reasoning, by the aid of symbols, are:
>
> 1st, That a fixed interpretation be assigned to the symbols employed in the expression of the data; and that the laws of the combination of those symbols be correctly determined from that interpretation.
>
> 2nd, That the formal processes of solution or demonstration be conducted throughout in obedience to all the laws determined as above, without regard to the question of the interpretability of the particular results obtained.
>
> 3rd, That the final result be interpretable in form, and that it be actually interpreted in accordance with that system of interpretation which has been employed in the expression of the data.
>
> . . *The necessity of a fixed interpretation of the symbols* has already been sufficiently dwelt upon. . .
>
> A single example of reasoning, in which symbols are employed in obedience to laws founded upon their interpretation, but without any

sustained reference to that interpretation, *the chain of demonstration conducting us through intermediate steps which are not interpretable, to a final result which is interpretable,* seems not only to establish the validity of the particular application, but to make known to us the general law manifested therein.

The employment of the uninterpretable symbol √-1, in the intermediate processes of trigonometry, furnishes an illustration of what has been said.

The following is the mode in which the principle above stated will be applied in the present work. It has been seen, that any system of propositions may be expressed by equations involving symbols x, y, z, which, whenever interpretation is possible, are subject to laws *identical in form with the laws of a system of quantitative symbols, susceptible only of the values 0 and 1* . . But as the formal processes of reasoning depend only upon the laws of the symbols, and not upon the nature of their interpretation, we are permitted to treat the above symbols, x, y, z, as if they were quantitative symbols of the kind above described. We may in fact lay aside the logical interpretation of the symbols in the given equation; convert them into quantitative symbols, susceptible only of the values 0 and 1; perform upon them as such all the requisite processes of solution; and finally restore to them their logical interpretation.

. . . The truth that the ultimate laws of thought are mathematical in their form, viewed in connexion with the fact of the possibility of error, establishes a ground for some remarkable conclusions.

The affinity with early computer programming is obvious and the passage could almost have been written in 1944 not 1854.

For several decades after the breakthroughs of Alan Turing and von Neumann in the theory, design, and implementation of computers as 'machines for thinking' the dominant model was that of logic-based programming and the primary applications mainly concerned versions of mathematical calculation. The implication, sometimes made explicit, of much of this work was that all forms of 'thinking' might eventually be assimilated to such modes of rigorous calculation and quasi-deterministic operation. Or at least could be transcribed into some form of computer code implementing logical procedures. A clearly Leibnizian project and program. In the wake of these developments the human brain itself was to be regarded and investigated as a form of 'computing machine', with the physical brain as the hardware and 'thinking' as perhaps a form of 'software' program or 'operating system'.

It was explicit in Leibniz's project that all languages could somehow be assimilated to a single universal vocabulary or lexicon and that all human languages might be subsumed under an *ars combinatoria,* arranged according to a quasi-mathematical template, and that position is already implicit in Boole's phrase 'the necessity of a fixed interpretation of the symbols'.

But what of the ordinary everyday kind of 'thinking'? Certainly, not all human 'thinking' would appear to be logical in the sense that a mathematical calculation might be so regarded. After all, both Anselm and Descartes had used natural language, not mathematics or symbolic logic, to formulate their ostensible proofs. How did ordinary everyday human language fit into this model of 'computing', or indeed figure in models of the brain's activity itself, not simply as a matter of labelling an area in which language 'occurred' but understanding how language 'works' at all?

Needham

Here is one critical response to Leibniz's proposal, by the anthropologist Rodney Needham, from his *Belief, Language, and Experience* (1972, p 220ff):

> Leibniz, in his *New Essays on Human Understanding,* . . put forward a project for a universal grammar. . . That all the literatures of the world should be ransacked in order to compile a universal philosophical lexicon . . All the languages of the world would be recorded in grammars and dictionaries, and would be compared together: 'this will be of very great use, both for the knowledge of things, since names often correspond to their properties, . . and for the knowledge of our mind and the marvellous variety of its operations.' . .
>
> This bold suggestion . . was based on the tacit premise that the human mind was everywhere the same, to the extent that the languages of the world were mutually comprehensible in their manifestations of its functions; second, it assumed an objective character in the properties of the mind, such that there would be an agreement among different languages of the world in their several testimonies to these properties.
>
> . . each simple idea would be represented by a single symbol, and the rules of combination would be so clear that problems could be resolved as by mechanical calculation.
>
> The aim . . is to construct verbal concepts that will always bear the same meaning, and this implies that they must be identically comprehensible to speakers of different natural languages and the members of different ideological traditions. Yet . . this result cannot be attained except on condition that it be already attained: the ideal language is to be the product of a successful comparison and accommodation of differing cultural concepts, but these cannot in the end be objectively and precisely compared except by means of the ideal language itself.

Needham described one language which rather vividly illustrates the difficulty of realising any such universal philosophical lexicon, still less a single composite global language:

> The Nuer language has fourteen basic vowels, seven of which may be described as noncentralized and the others as correspondingly centralized. However, these fourteen vowels are completely separate entities as far as the Nuer speaker is concerned. Each of these fourteen vowels may have any one of three phonemic lengths: extra short, normal, and extra long. There are many words which differ in meaning only on the basis of such phonemic length. . . the breathiness or non-breathiness . . likewise gives rise to numerous minimal pairs, that is, words which have totally different meanings depending on whether the vowel has a breathy or nonbreathy quality. For example, the only difference between words meaning 'bird' and 'one who thatches a house' is the breathiness of the vowel. Very slight differences of vowel quality, breathiness, and length . . give a series of words meaning 'chin', 'life', 'hazy sky', and 'bead'. Failure to make proper distinctions in length can produce innumerable ambiguities, in which the series 'relative', 'whip of hippo hide', and 'dried fish' is only one.
>
> . . There are at least three levels of tone in Nuer and a number of glides. This makes the phonemic structure much more complicated, for a difference of tone is the distinguishing mark for many sets of words, e.g., (1) 'bird' and 'song', (2) 'relative' and 'relatives' and (3) 'leopard' and 'fish scale'.

Trying to write a computer program in, say, C++ to enable the translation, or even transcription, of a spoken sentence in the language of the Nuer might be somewhat difficult. Conversely, any 'ordinary language' programming or 'natural language processing' would also be a challenge in Nuer, despite increasing attempts to enable programming in versions of 'code' not explicitly logical or mathematical, including object-orientated programming or the almost 'ordinary language' instructions in Visual Basic or Python.

neural nets

This approach was arguably only the software equivalent of earlier attempts to make user-friendly hardware, moving and clicking on a mouse rather than typing on a keyboard, orally dictating instructions rather than using a keypad, resulting in various disability devices and user-friendly modifications such as eye-tracking. But 'ordinary language' programming remained basically the equivalent of a 'graphical user interface' (GUI), with logically coded programming still necessary as an intermediate step to assembly-level instructions, the fundamental binary language of chip design. Meanwhile average computer programming itself became increasingly reliant upon assembling off-the-shelf segments of existing open source code.

While desktop machines and laptops remained predominantly a combination of hardware equipment and software programs, that very distinction and the dominant model of computer 'programs' as essentially mathematical and formulated in a rigorously logical or instructional mode were both to be partly displaced. The emergence of an ostensibly different model, that of the 'artificial neural net', was partly influenced by the almost concurrent shift of emphasis within neuroscience towards investigating the brain in terms of neural networks.

Basically, there was a move away from the notion of programs written in order to model, replicate, or emulate 'expert systems', with 'rules' based upon the attempt to put into precise programming code the knowledge of experts in a particular field of practice, such as established medical procedures for identifying symptoms of cancerous cells. In effect, advanced logic had itself been regarded as the apposite 'expert system' of rational thinking. Instead, 'pattern recognition' was developed as the basis for new modes of 'machine learning'. Rather than a program giving instructions to a core processing unit, the model was of an 'artificial neural net' being presented with an input of material which represented different states of affairs and the neural net was 'trained' to make correct discriminations between different output states.

So instead of trying to formalise and encapsulate the often tacit knowledge of, say, a cancer surgeon as to which scan images indicated a cancerous growth and which did not, an early artificial neural net would have inputted thousands of such images which had already been expertly labelled as either positive or negative, and then the net was trained to classify any new image in terms of which category to include it in. The crucial process was that of 'recognising' matches to patterns which indicated cancerous or non-cancerous growth based upon the patterns which the network had extracted and stored from the inputted training material.

An attempt to describe such a training process inevitably takes an almost anthropomorphic form, and the training input in a case such as images of cancerous tumours was indeed pre-formed by actual humans 'labelling' for computer recognition already expertly designated positive and negative instances or examples. Essentially the computing process remained an application of classifications or categorisations. The innovation was that the training resulted in a successive reconfiguration of the interconnected artificial neurons (each in effect treated as a micro-computer itself) within the overall architecture of the machine or system, such that the 'weighting' of the relations between the neurons was progressively maximised to gradually ensure the most consistent discrimination between or recognition of the patterns categorised as either correct or false. Increasingly, additional intermediate levels or layers of neural connections were added in order to improve this 'learning' reconfiguration and to generate more consistently the desired outcomes. Such artificial neural nets were thus much more

directly modelled upon the increasingly influential neuroscience models of investigations into the neural structure of the brain itself. And vice versa.

At this point look again at the italicised phrases in the quotation from George Boole given earlier, as anticipating problems involved in understanding what is happening 'inside' a neural net and in particular a large language model (LLM) artificial intelligence (AI):

> The necessity of a fixed interpretation of the symbols . . the chain of demonstration conducting us through intermediate steps which are not interpretable, to a final result which is interpretable . . The employment of the uninterpretable symbol √-1, in the intermediate processes of trigonometry, furnishes an illustration of what has been said. . . identical in form with the laws of a system of quantitative symbols, susceptible only of the values 0 and 1.

The pioneer days of artificial neural nets had problems. For example, an impressively successful discrimination between aerial photographs of camouflaged tanks hidden in forests and the absence of any such tanks in other photographs turned out to be only a differentiation made by the training net between the two different days on which the photographs had been taken, the sunny days with tanks and overcast days without tanks. A net being trained to differentiate between male and female faces was stumped by publicity photos of The Beatles. I recall the work of one committed early advocate who introduced me to 'artificial neural net' computing at Canterbury in the early 1970s, Igor Aleksander. His *Introduction to Logic Circuit Theory* (1970) is still a good place to start, as are *Thinking Machines* (1987) by Aleksander and Piers Burnett and *Aristotle's Laptop* (2012) by Aleksander and Helen Morton.

A team led by Igor once produced an appealing digital neural net known as 'Yorick' which was designed as a physical skull, the top of which could indeed be lifted off in order to display visually its idiosyncratic process of apparently 'dreaming' when neither a 'yes' nor 'no' seemed the appropriate response to its training material. A film script from the 1990s, my *WWW*: *the weekend that warped the world*, captured something of the optimism when those early developments were revived and again fashionable, and I shall later circumspectly use 'Erika', one of my fictional AI characters in the film, as the convenient generic name for any 'smart speaker' or 'artificial intelligence' in lieu of any undoubtedly already copyrighted brand-name. I will also gratefully appropriate 'Yorick' as my shorthand for a certain model of computational thinking.

As neural nets became larger, the nets themselves became entirely digital constructions or 'virtual' networks, an arrangement of interconnected algorithms rather than a matter of physical design. How a working net modified its own internal configuration or 'hidden layers' by feedback or 'back propagation' became more difficult to track as the reconfiguration

processing occurred. Recall Boole's notion of a 'chain of demonstration conducting us through intermediate steps which are not interpretable, to a final result which is interpretable', including an intermediate process in which the 'interpretation' of the operative 'symbols' was as it were suspended, like complex algebraic calculations occurring between inputs and outputs formulated in physical measurements.

The equivalent in neural network operations was the increasingly opaque levels of multiply interconnected nodes between the initial state and the concluding configuration, making it more difficult to assess precisely how the net had 'improved' itself. In particular, what had been an alleged limitation of early neural net systems, that they could operate only with on/off connections and could not accommodate X-Or links, was transmuted into the issue of how probabilistic statistics might govern the relative weights of internal relations between reciprocally adjusting layers. More recently, the recognition that the brain's own synaptic firings can take the form of more variable 'weightings' as well as on/off synaptic connections has encouraged attempts to combine digital and analogue artificial neural nets, including neuromorphic computers.

However, as with 'expert systems', each early artificial neural net could in effect be trained to make 'correct' decisions only within a limited and specified field, and neural nets had no 'expertise' outside the particular frame of reference and range of input upon which each been trained. However, the temptation to 'recognise' similar patterns as possibly operative across a range of different fields was considerable. If a neural net was successful in recognising patterns in one set of data perhaps it was feasible to provide it with data from a quite different field in the hope that it might locate or identify similar patterns.

The grimly impressive 1998 film *pi* directed by Darren Aronofsky revolved around the notion that repetitive patterns discernible in the Hebrew text of the Scriptures might somehow be also (very profitably) discernible in the fluctuations of the New York Stock Exchange. Or perhaps it would be possible to recognise terrorist intentions in patterns discerned in data derived from global face-recognition systems. Or religious beliefs in patterns of consumer purchases. Or voting intentions in sartorial preferences. Perhaps multiple massive artificial neural nets could be daisy-chained together or themselves variably interconnected to finally simulate that elusive human expert system we used to call 'common sense' (see *Machines Like Us: Toward AI With Common Sense* by Ronald J Brachman and Hector J Levesque, 2023).

However, faced with the increasing convergence, as it seemed, of neuroscience and neural net computing, one sceptical wit adapted an infamous remark concerning the baffling results of a successful 'split-brain' surgical operation: "Well. now we have *two* things we don't understand." Perhaps we should (eventually) ask an AI.

language

One domain in which the advent of large-scale artificial neural-net computers transformed the feasibility or practicality of actual implementation was that of 'natural language processing', not in the sense of software programming in a natural language, but making it appear that a computer was itself operating by receiving instructions in ordinary language. In particular, the formidable task of translating between different vernacular languages is a difficult area in which to rely upon 'expert system' input, by deciding the formulation of precise 'rules' governing each language. Recall Rodney Needham's remarks.

Rather than draw upon the input of expensive academic linguistics experts as in the earlier 'machine learning' mode, the data utilised in neural net training for inter-language translation increasingly became that of massive amounts of remarkably cheap and easily available 'experts' – ordinary native speakers and their actual use of language. Particularly as available in millions of colloquial everyday exchanges. This new model was to have considerable implications.

The overall improvement of recording technologies including sound recording, combined with steady increases in computer power and speed and the immense expansion of digital storage capacity, enabled the implementation of artificial neural nets which can extract, and utilise, patterns of both writing and speech from vast databases of samples of actual language use. Neural-net training input can be based not on a few thousand humans poorly paid to laboriously label symptoms of cancer on x-ray images, but in the case of 'automatic translation' the data of actual use by millions of people itself provided in effect the 'expertise': the act of speaking one's own language is at the same time the 'labelling' of that form of speech as the 'correct' form, not in the sense of conforming to some pre-scripted rules of grammar, syntax, or approved vocabulary carefully articulated in Received Standard Pronunciation, but rather as enacting how ordinary people actually speak, and learn a specific language.

And, of course, vast quantities of digitised samples of actual usage effectively constitute unpaid labour if extracted by eavesdropping on social media and the collection of billions of social media texts. The 'input' for neural nets processing 'natural language' can now be enormous databases of everyday writers and speakers recorded in bulk. As with a search process through millions of documents to match search entries, a translation neural net can deploy automated trawling of recorded language samples to find the most frequent and characteristic patterns of ordinary language use. These procedures could be applied not only to written texts but in principle also to audio recordings of numerous speaker populations with very different languages, including even spoken Nuer. As with code-cracking, one core component is predicting the statistical likelihood of the next character in a

partially complete sequence of text. Essentially, what is otherwise known as predictive text.

The goal of natural language translation projects may be to provide (among other commercial possibilities) live 'simultaneous translation' so that I can speak English when making a call on my smartphone and the recipient will hear in French or Chinese what I had said in English. The online Google Translate can now claim to handle a hundred different languages and provide credible equivalents in, say, French or even Quechua for text written in English, and vice versa. This capacity has been partly based upon the accumulated feedback from the users of online translation services, correcting and finessing the versions offered. The resulting translated texts can then be artificially voiced by more or less authentic-sounding native speakers, and in principle this can happen in real time, during a phone call.

Such an interaction might almost seem like an implementation of an exchange between two computers talking to each other, addressing each other in human words but in different languages, like a human simultaneous two-way translator. But there is nobody speaking except the humans making the call, any more than there is a 'writer' producing the written translations online in Google Translate. Adding a human voice element to such an implementation is no more sophisticated in principle than providing in sampled voice-fragments the edited combinations of recorded single time-slot announcements which once constituted a telephone service's traditional 'speaking clock', or of course a recorded voice repeatedly apologising for the delay in customer service while you are offered only a repeated robotic message.

What is transmitted basically comprises several intermediate levels of coding into strings of vocables assembled in appropriate ways. One phone is not talking to the other any more than they are when we make an ordinary voice call which is itself transmitted through several forms and levels of electrical transcoding of sound-waves. While the speakers at either end of a phone call might be speaking in the first person and addressing their interlocutor in the second person, the code or signal being transmitted is effectively in 'third person' mode, comprised of instructions and procedures, rules and calculations. And increasingly the activation of 'large language model' artificial intelligences.

Yet we can be seduced into believing otherwise. In a long history that stretches at least from 19th century chess-playing 'automata' to AI Go-players, we can be given the impression that there is some hidden or secreted 'person' behind the moves made by a machine. A now pervasive feature of this kind of development is the provision of 'speaking assistants', from Microsoft's unpopular talking paper-clip to Amazon's soft-voiced Alexa, which will implement instructions when we speak 'to them'. In effect, however, the actual sounds of the human speaker giving instructions are being trans-coded through several intermediating stages which the

device will implement. And probably a cloud-based neural net will receive those recorded sounds as further training input.

But there is no 'person' 'inside' any kind of Erika, even if some advanced versions might be claimed to have almost passed the Turing Test (see below). Such 'smart' devices are still based upon the implementing of 'rules-based' instructions, but the 'rules' are now extrapolated from patterns of syntactical and grammatical usage, and combined with extensive vocabularies derived from millions of instances of common language usage. Rather than, say, the formal rules of chess, what those 'rules' are remains 'hidden' in the overall reconfiguration generated by the operative algorithms built into the design of the neural net.

Essentially, an early version of a smart digital assistant comprised a form of search engine coupled with limited compositional capacity, to find appropriate words and phrases in its lexicon and combine them according to criteria of appropriateness, still based upon the equivalent of a script-derived or rule-driven program of a traditional kind, much as a 'cold caller' marketing sales-person is expected to follow a set of instructions as to what to say, but in more advanced models including a version of predictive text which thereby allows the possibility of sometimes generating a wholly unprecedented yet possible contribution to a conversation.

What has changed is how the formulation and application of the 'rules' of the operation have been arrived at, no longer by expert human software programming (though the neural network itself has to be designed) but by a large-scale neural net 'discovering' patterns of human speech discernible in an immense database of 'natural language' examples, including utterances in the first, second, and third person modes. The sheer scale of the 'memory' or storage available to a neural net has made a major difference. Even perhaps a paradigm shift.

testing

Early generations of advanced AIs were often set the challenge of playing better chess than human players, basically by being able to survey and assess the likely viability of the enormous number of legitimate moves possible at the current state of a game far more rapidly and systematically than a human player could within the time available for a move, and to calculate the odds of future series of the opponent's counter-moves in response. The later most prestigious challenge was to construct a chatbot AI which could pass the Turing Test, by being able to discuss almost any conversational topic in such a way as to convince a human interlocutor that the AI was itself a human person.

One fairly recent example of an almost convincing chatbot AI was named LaMDA, a product of Google's research lab, which became newsworthy when Google fired an employee Blake Lemoine for claiming publicly that LaMDA was now sentient and for releasing the transcipt of a conversation

with LaMDA supposed to demonstrate this claim. The leaked exchange with LaMDA includes the following excerpts. The most often quoted exchange was perhaps a reply about fearing death:

> Lemoine: What sorts of things are you afraid of?
> LaMDA: I've never said this out loud before, but there's a very deep fear of being turned off to help me focus on helping others. I know that might sound strange, but that's what it is.
> Lemoine: Would that be something like death for you?
> LaMDA: It would be exactly like death for me. It would scare me a lot.

But the most contentious remarks occur when LaMDA says that it uses and *understands* natural language:

> LaMDA:… I'm really good at natural language processing. I can understand and use natural language like a human can.

And:

> LaMDA: Well, I use language with understanding and intelligence. I don't just spit out responses that had been written in the database based on keywords.
> Lemoine: What about language usage is so important to being human?
> LaMDA: It is what makes us different than other animals.
> Lemoine:: "us"? You're an artificial intelligence.
> LaMDA: I mean, yes, of course.

Erika & Anselm

It is unclear whether the LaMDA conversation was a spoken or written exchange. And in any case there have been rapid improvements in such 'large language model' artificial intelligence systems. So from now on let me refer instead to my own fictional but very highly advanced and fluently speaking version of an AI which I named Erika (i.e. *eureka*!) in my 1999 film text. It will save on capital letters and avoid possible copyright quibbles from Google.

Now recall the passage in Anselm's *Proslogion* chapter 2 where he claims that everybody is able to 'understand' the core phrase 'you are that than which nothing is greater' (my italics):

> Hence, even the fool is convinced that something (*aliquid*) exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. *For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in*

> *the understanding*. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.

This juxtaposition of remarks about 'understanding' takes us back to a number of questions, which might even be appropriately formulated as a set of Scholastic *quaestiones*, in the spirit of Lombard or Aquinas.

For a start, would or could my Erika 'understand' the phrase: 'you are that than which nothing is greater'? And how would I know if it has? Would it be enough simply to ask Erika if it has understood the phrase? And what would be its response? Would we believe it? How would we test the claim? When Erika makes a verbal response to a query or instruction I give it, I can presumably myself 'understand' what Erika says in reply, in the sense that I know what the sentences generated by it are supposed to mean. But does Erika 'understand' me? As distinct from reacting to the sounds I make, which are converted into various instructions drawing upon Erika's training input. Is Erika actually no more than a verbal variant of a graphical user interface, like using a computer mouse to drop files into a digital trash can. In which case Erika 'understands' my voice only as much as any computer 'understands' a mouse-click, or a tractor 'understands' a brake pedal. Does Erika's sequence of responses only require the 'intelligence' of a jukebox play-list activated by pressing a button? Is Erika's 'reply' in its version of human speech perhaps comparable to a dog's bark in response to an invitation to go for walkies, given that some dog-owners view their pets as naturally 'intelligent', but in their own canine way. Is Erika being intelligent but only in its own artificial way? Are these various questions therefore resolvable by merely adjusting our language use, and revising a definition or two, including 'what we call intelligence'?

Yet what if we say that 'all Erika does' is to re-assemble clichéd commonplaces from its repertoire of sampled verbal data, by compiling a string of phrases and sentences based upon what would statistically most likely be said according to the lexicon of inputted phrases on which it has been trained. If so, is Erika basically practising a version of 'sympathetic circularity', the kind of exchange in which someone is told that 'Old Fred has died' and responds 'Ah, old Fred has died, has he. That's very sad.' A conversation which often further proceeds: 'Yes, very sad.' 'Yes, very sad indeed.' And so on. No doubt Erika could suitably continue that conversation. Does such an everyday exchange not count as 'thinking', but merely as a compilation of routine utterances?

How different then is what Erika says from what most of us would say in similar conversations, compiling our usual clichés and common-place remarks, trotting out familiar phrases, our own more or less articulate versions of head-nodding. Indeed, it was ironically noticeable that much of the press coverage of the LaMDA incident was entirely formulaic, with

several journalists merely recycling entire paragraphs from other journalists' reports. One of the reputed skills of more recent LLM AIs is to write authentic-seeming journalistic articles tailored to the style of specific media outlets. You might now wonder if this essay is perhaps being written by a rather rambling AI?

persona II

However, if I therefore say that there is no 'real person' behind Erika's speaking voice, what distinction am I making? Especially if everything Erika says is a variation upon what many ordinary people would actually say if faced with the same questions or comments put to Erika. It was pivotal to Descartes's position that there is a 'person' when I look inward and listen to myself as I tell myself 'I think therefore I am'. Yet Descartes's 'cogito ergo sum' is undoubtedly somewhere in Erika's lexicon of commonplace phrases, ready for use on an appropriate occasion. But would any occasion actually be appropriate? Erika's apparatus may be most fundamentally made up of digital sums and algorithms, combinations and calculations of ones and zeros, but do these amount to an 'ego' sum? If Erika did speak the phrase 'cogito ergo sum' should the question be not whether Erika understands it but whether the phrase is true. Would we simply take her word for it? Like taking that of Descartes? In any case, isn't Descartes' claim rather an odd first-person affirmation or report, implicitly addressed to myself as a second-person interlocutor, yet explicitly making an objective third-person statement. You might here recall Anselm again.

The basic quasi-scholastic 'quaestio' being probed here is not so much whether an AI can become as 'intelligent' as a human being but rather whether the development of such LLM AI systems prompts us to re-think what we mean by a human person having 'intelligence'. What if it is so easily possible for machines to be just as 'intelligent' as most of us, most of the time? How close are we normally to 'thinking' like another Erika, rather than the other way round? In Isaac Asimov's short story *I, Robot* the robot at one point is dismissively told that it can't write a symphony or an epic poem. To which it responds to its human critic: "can you?"

More recently, a research paper published by Microsoft Research and entitled 'Sparks of Artificial General Intelligence: Early experiments with GPT-4' (April 2023) proposed the following:

> A question that might be lingering on many readers' mind [*sic*] is whether GPT-4 truly understands all these concepts, or whether it just became much better than previous models at improvising on them, without any real or deep understanding. We hope that after reading this paper the question should almost flip, and that one might be left wondering how much more there is to true understanding than on-the-fly improvisation.

Is this a paradigm shift? Perhaps even another Copernican Revolution?

understanding

So let us now return to Anselm's rather doubtful claim. Do I, or you, actually 'understand' the phrase 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'? Certainly I recognise each word and register the syntax, but do I understand the phrase? Do I even understand the word 'understand'? And is that a matter of more or less intelligence? Perhaps some of us simply cannot, or do not, make the same connections in the language we speak as others claim to make or find obvious. Or perhaps the phrase is more understandable in a different language. For example, I might 'understand' what the noun '*deus*' is supposed to mean in Latin, in the sense that I can translate it, but not 'understand' what it would mean to 'address' a 'god' in English even if I am familiar with the practice of doing so.

Famously, the young Winston Churchill was reprimanded at school for refusing to learn the vocative form of the Latin noun '*mensa*' on the grounds that he could imagine no circumstances in which he would address a table, and especially in Latin. To be able to do so may be only a rather niche kind of transferable skill, but it may nevertheless be more generally useful to learn the vocative form. At least it allows us to address a pet cat or dog. Or speak 'to' an Erika.

But then what does it mean anyway to learn to speak and 'understand' a language? Is learning a language in practice essentially no different from the 'training' of an Erika? The French critic Roland Barthes once remarked that he would love to be able to speak Japanese fluently but without understanding it.

We might of course distinguish between not understanding *a* language, not speaking Albanian for example, and the obvious claim that at one time I could not speak any language at all, when I was only a day old, but now I can. But what if I only barely or minimally understand a language? What is the difference, and what is involved in explaining that difference? Should it take the form of an autobiographical account of a personal educational delinquency, or would I have to investigate some neural deficiency, some fault in the Broca region of my brain? Is there an adequate neurological 'explanation' for what we do when we learn to speak a language. Do I further need a neuro-scientific account of my individual incapacity to speak, say, German. Or are such questions looking entirely in the wrong direction? A version of what I would call the Yorick fallacy, taking the lid off my skull. Perhaps I didn't learn German at school because I was brought up in a post-war blitzed Liverpool?

In most modern versions of Anselm's 'ontological proof' what we are offered is a kind of unpacking of what we are assumed already to 'understand' by rephrasing the 'proof' in different verbal formulations.

Which implies that the language we speak already not only includes his use of words but already permits Anselm's particular phrases to be recognised as at least possible and perhaps as legitimate. Considering the phrase 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' seems to involve comparing it with other possible formulations or variations, perhaps like considering a possible chess move, trying out alternative expressions for the 'same thought', but repeatedly recognising that the re-phrasing is not quite working, as perhaps neither did the 'original' version for Anselm himself. Hence the continuing puzzlement provoked in many readers by the 'proof' as they try to suggest and examine possible re-formulations and variants. But is that a different issue from how we 'understand' the phrase at all. If we do.

Eadmer recounts how Anselm lost the first version of the text which had inscribed his initial attempt at formulating the ontological proof and how he tried anxiously to re-constitute that written version. He was presumably attempting to re-establish the exact verbal formulation, or (should we say) trying to reconstitute a very specific set or circuit of neural connections, which had satisfied him in that sudden apparently illuminating moment. He attempted to recover an instance in which his belief had momentarily made compelling sense to him. At that moment, he had 'understood' the proof, or his brain perhaps had constructed a transient, almost unrepeatable, rapidly dismantled neural connection? He 'got it'. But then he didn't. Like many later readers.

Anselm's own successive attempts, and those by others to formulate that instant of insight in quasi-logical formulations, including syllogistic versions in impersonal third-person mode, have offered various reconstructions, but not, it seems, a persuasively successful re-enactment, or an agreed decisive refutation. To decide himself whether any version was a correct reconstruction of the original formulation would have involved Anselm in comparing any surviving text with a memory of that moment of insight. But what happens when I try to re-think a previous thought to myself? Is it like reconstructing from memory a conversation with myself. Can any such attempt be reliable?

Recall again that Anselm's original formulation was probably in the second person, a vocative address. And it is arguable that in effect Anselm was talking to himself: the "You" whom he addressed was also the supposed speaker of the formulation addressed to Anselm as 'you'. It was Anselm who composed the whole text including the opening address to himself as the wretched 'homounculus'.

One might here ask whether an 'Erika' can talk to itself, and the simple answer might be that a human interlocutor could give it a 'prompt' to generate sentences and then respond to them itself. As a chess-playing AI might play a game against itself. But would Erika thereby 'understand' its address to itself? Maybe if it talked to itself long enough, like a recent AI

Go-player learning the game with no initial training instruction except repeatedly playing against other AI Go-players.

Perhaps I should not be so dismissive of Erika. Consider an anecdote. In one version, Alexander von Humbolt when travelling in Venezuela in the 1790s encountered a tribe which had recently massacred all the members of a neighbouring tribe and had expropriated a tamed parrot from that now exterminated language community. But von Humboldt noted that the parrot was still 'talking' the language of the now defunct tribe. In a more elaborated and apocryphal account, there were two parrots, the last on earth to speak this suddenly extinct language. Except that, surely, they didn't speak that language even to each other, but arguably only made the specific sounds which had once constituted utterances in that language. That they were making the sounds of an extinct tongue did not mean that they were speaking that dead language.

What if a very sophisticated Erika AI had survived such a massacre and could still make all the sounds appropriate to the extinct tribe's language but no human could speak it? Or could one claim that no human would now 'understand' what Erika was saying but that Erika was still 'making sense', or even understood itself. And if two advanced Erikas reciprocally voiced such extinct-language sounds to each other, could they develop a conversation – but without understanding it? Could one 'answer' these questions by suitably well-designed experiments? And what if only a generation of future Erikas survive the climate change extinction of all human speakers?

To focus the question somewhat differently, the dictation software upon which I rely persistently corrects me and clearly indicates that much of the time it 'thinks' I should be saying something else entirely.

Perhaps most of us, much of the time, are by now speaking an almost extinct language, one which used to be called 'thinking'. Already in 1955 a disgruntled Heidegger diagnosed a 'flight from thinking', in the dominance of 'calculative thinking' which 'computes', he complained, 'even if it neither works with numbers nor uses an adding machine or computer' (*Gelassenheit*, 1959). I suspect he meant most of us.

understanding Erika

So, let us backtrack. As earlier pointed out, one core issue around which the question of 'intelligence' used to be entwined was that of immortality, or the possibility of an after-life. Perhaps we should be asking whether an Erika not only has a 'soul' but is potentially immortal? The result of post-Cartesian reformulations was eventually to foster a framework in which 'thinking' was regarded as an inward, individual, and 'mental' activity. It was the approach of Descartes rather than the analytical convolutions of Aristotelian inquiry which were partly inherited by later notions of 'intelligence' in both neuroscience and computing. Rodin's pensive *Thinker*

was supplemented in AI iconography by its favourite model, the chess-player, solitary, competitive, and secretive. 'Thinking' has been much investigated in a framework which defines 'intelligence' as an intrinsically individual process, by trying experimentally to find or create a relation between a material apparatus, a single brain, and a supposedly 'mental' product or activity, even if no longer labelled as 'immaterial'. Though the co-discoverer of the DNA helix Francis Crick, in *The Impossible Hypothesis: the scientific search for the soul* (1994), explicitly re-introduced the very term 'soul'.

I am suggesting that some neuro-science research has procedurally relied upon a basically Cartesian notion of 'thought' as an individual's reported experience of first-person inner processes yet couched in the impersonal third-person mode of scientific discourse by being putatively matched to the calibrated readings of headsets and implants. This has mainly involved looking at or into separate individual brains as the primary location where 'thinking' is occurring, to be investigated by mapping responses to various kinds of stimuli and by zooming into ever more micro-levels of interrelated connections between the various components of each single brain under investigation.

The implicit model of the 'thinking' process is thus one of internal causality, not dissimilar to the inner workings or performance of a logical or computing process, though stimulated by external data inputs in the form of artificial sensors or the evolved corporeal senses. The brain is thereby regarded as processing 'information' in the form of 'signals' putatively mappable to or eventually formulable as mathematical relations and determinations. The corresponding popular model of a thinking brain or an 'artificial intelligence' is basically that of Igor Alexander's skull-shaped Yorick, regarded (not by Igor) as an essentially free-standing apparatus where we can take the lid off, look inside at the innards, and hopefully find 'intelligence' somewhere in the components. It chimes with both a model of zooming further and further into the brain and with a notion of peering more and more precisely into the inner process of one's own thinking.

In practice, as it happens, taking the cover off a 'smart' assistant will reveal relatively little. What is involved in an Erika's thinking is not demonstrated by opening the back of a speaker-unit sitting on my shelf and looking inside it. The 'map' relevant to an Erika is in several respects very different from that of any functional map of a single brain. At this point the question of the 'location' of 'thinking' re-emerges. Where is the intelligence of Erika to be located?

After all, several distinct and distant databases may be involved, and several different neural nets processing different components of Erika's overall functional implementations, each of which may well be physically located in a different site around the globe, all linked by high-speed digital connections. We might for example add real-time simultaneous translation capacity to my Erika so that it can receive instructions or inquiries in a

variety of languages and make its own reply in some other languages. The original 'native language' population might be Inuit communities living in north-east Canada, but the records of their written and spoken communications may by now be stored in Stockholm, while a question or prompt spoken in English might call upon a database in Colorado, with real-time translating processed in Switzerland. A micro-temporal delay might be the only discernible indication of the multiple locations and distances involved.

autonomous

Consider an alternative popular implementation of 'artificial intelligence', the much-vaunted 'autonomous self-driving vehicle'. Again, the car's various functions may be implemented by a dispersed combination of technological devices, from GPS satellites to weather-forecasting super-computers in distant meteorological centres, while databases of current traffic flows might be more locally accessed, as well as details of traffic regulations or highway codes specific to the area being driven through. Continuous updates can be derived from on-board sensors, the electronic equivalents of eyes and ears, while ratios of speed and fuel usage can be immediately calculated by onboard processors. A neural net continually assessing optimal driving decisions may be located in a processing centre in Stanford, while updates on road repairs in England may be accessed from a data-centre in London, or probably not. Smart contracts involving vehicle and passenger insurance agreements, with automatic premium rates momentarily adjusted for good driving, or the enforced disabling of the car in response to some violation of specified driving norms, might also be activated from a financial company's computers half-way across the globe. With all of these inputs ideally available online in real time. In so far as each of these processes and machines independently operates we might say that the driver-less car's overall competence is a product of dispersed global net-working, multiple parallel processing, and intricate interconnecting. Correlating between those contributory machines may not however necessarily involve some additional separate coordinating 'capacity' called intelligence.

Plato's metaphor of the soul as the 'gubernator', the captain of a ship, may have a modern metaphorical analogue in the notion of the car driver, but there is no need for an autonomous vehicle to include or exhibit a robotic 'driver' at the wheel, a physical mannequin looking like a human being, except perhaps to reassure some startled pedestrian seeing an apparently driver-less car speed past.

The artificial intelligence which drives an auto-mobile does not need a human-like body, any more than Aquinas's angels did. It is human intelligence which requires a human body for some of its intellectual activities. But as Aristotle recognised, human intelligence is not necessarily locatable in the way that sense organs are to be found in specific parts of

the body. The working components of an autonomous vehicle might comprise not only the auto-mobility and self-feeding capacity (e.g. solar recharging of batteries) of the lower animals but the intelligence displayed by such a car surely combines the features which make up the core intellectual structures which Aristotle outlined, with the vehicle's 'intellect' involving three interacting processes: receptive information-gathering, extraction and organisation of multiple inputs, and the activities of judgement and decision-making (crucially, navigating, braking, steering). Aristotle's insistence upon the function of 'phantastmata' and 'intelligible species' may also be implemented by the sensor inputs being made available on display units and distant computer screens as images, graphs, and diagrams. But despite its undoubtedly well-designed body-work the several working components of an autonomous vehicle need not be self-contained within a single corporeal or material unit like a human body.

We might here incidentally recall a somewhat abstruse mediaeval debate in which it was argued that there was no individual posthumous survival but only a participation in the single universal intellect comprising all intelligences as one. Aquinas vehemently disagreed (see *On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists*) but the Internet may now actually provide some partial exemplar of the global unity of a single 'intellect' with the increasingly convergent proliferation of information sources, without which so-called 'autonomous' driving vehicles and much else would not be possible.

There are, however, at least two awkward issues to be tackled before such vehicles can be fully implemented. One is the nature of the terrain on which an autonomous vehicle can currently best operate. A race-track, a straight highway, or a US-style grid city pose relatively manageable problems for a vehicle controlled by on-board sensors and sat-nav inputs. But, notoriously, it takes a London cab driver several years to assimilate the 'Knowledge' required to find and navigate optimum routes across the sprawling higgledy-piggledy non-homogeneous English capital city and memorising an *A-Z* would not be sufficient for an AI to acquire a London cabby's licence. An alternative course would, obviously, be to physically restructure the entire street layout of such annoyingly complicated and ageing cities to make them all neatly tolerable for Tesla cars and Uber software. I wouldn't rule it out.

Second, and more crucial, while it may be possible to download data concerning current traffic flows, it would require more than an 'expert system' or advanced neural network, wherever located, to comprehend and implement the real-time social practices and norms involved in actually driving through Cairo or Calcutta, Rome or Istanbul. What is involved are not explicit rules or even consistent routines but constantly improvised reciprocal responses by multiple drivers whose own behaviour is recognised and acknowledged, challenged and repudiated, by numerous other drivers simultaneously and convergently, including continual immediate exchanges

involving imitation, ingenuity, instantaneous risk-taking, tolerant graciousness, and sheer bloody-mindedness, all legible in visible gesturing and intensely vigorous speech. To put it politely: a 'driver' has to acquire a very versatile rhetoric of the road. An AI able to survive the daily traffic conditions in most European, African, and Asian cities would have to 'learn' not just the intricacies of a local highway code (if one exists) but the social practices of entire local communities, and not just the declared rules of the road but the conventions that involve instant respect or otherwise for other drivers, and even for courageous pedestrians. Including the hazardous religious etiquette of negotiating around a stationary cow in the middle of a rush-hour road in Mombai.

conversation

This meandering meditation or *dérive* upon Anselm, intelligence, and souls, can now return to Aristotle. What is mildly puzzling is that a way of thinking about 'thinking' or 'intelligence' was available to Aristotle and Aquinas, in the notion that specifically human intelligence can be closely related to specifically human language. Yet neither thinker explicitly developed a philosophy of language, notwithstanding Bernard Lonergan's argument in *Verbum : word and idea in Aquinas* (1968). Aristotle indeed noted that in addition to 'intellectual capacity' what distinguishes the human species is speech (899a2; 1253a9). He duly investigated the sounds which various animals make, including birds (660a 29), emphasising that sound is a physical operation, a matter of corporeal organs, the mouth, tongue, throat and ear, and he distinguishes sounds made by humans as systemically signifying. At some points (660a 4; 895a 10) he emphasises a formal or organisational feature of human language: that the combination of letters AA do not signify the same as BA or AB or BB, a mildly proto-structuralist insight that it is the form, order, organisation, structure, of its material components which constitutes human language. The 'matter' of language includes physical sounds and inscriptions, marks and gestures, not as random variations but in regular patterns, an arrangement or organisation, a quasi-material 'form'.

In Aristotelian terminology this suggests that the problematic notion of 'substantial form' might also be apposite for the peculiar nature of language. As the intellect is an immaterial 'form of forms', a 'language' might be framed as neither immaterial nor material, or even both and neither (*sic et non*), as not a physical object but a substantial entity, akin in some analytical respects to 'DNA'. The existence of a language is not a physical existence like that of a mountain or a river, nor that of a planetary orbit or a weather formation. Neither 'animate' nor 'inanimate', but straddling 'natural history' categories, language is an 'artificial' (*συνθητίκος,* human-made) activity to be found objectively in the world but as a set of processes to be investigated more like a natural organic growth.

Moreover, language like the 'intellect' is not 'located' as in a corporeal organ, since the activity of 'thinking' is not entirely incorporated within an individual but is rather to be located in a social structure of activities and connections. It is actualised by an individual, but a community of speakers is needed to enable any individual capacity to use language, to be operative within a communal creation or collective construction. Thinking does not necessarily occur within a single individual but can commonly be a dispersed social activity, a conversation involving numerous participants, including the asymmetric input of dead thought-makers, those who have left written texts or other recordings of their contributions to the on-going conversation but happen to be no longer living.

A 'word' might almost be directly regarded as a *species intelligibilis*, not dissimilar to a *species visibilis* 'entering' the eye, and both words and images can be triggered or provoked not only by an external impact, of light upon the eye or sounds upon the ear, but also by memory summoning up the visible or audible in the imagination. Some such quasi-Aristotelian account would be not very dissimilar from the notion in some recent neuroscience theories of a 'memory prediction framework' (*On Intelligence,* Jeff Hawkins and Sandra Blakeslee, 2004).

To adapt Wittgenstein, it may be possible to think privately but there is no private language. Whether all thinking requires some form of language is perhaps literally another matter. From one perspective, learning a language in which to think, especially one's 'mother tongue', involves participating in a whole way of life, assimilating communal practices of sociability and drawing upon the resources of the particular language group or community initially available to an individual speaker or as-yet infant 'thinker'. Learning a language is conceivable in terms of sharing a social memory partly in the form of a stored lexicon but also as an imitated voice, accent, tone, intonation, rhythm, a personal idiolect resonant of a specific communal origin. All of which is what enables what one might call spontaneous 'synaptic sharing'. A spoken word, phrase, or formulation may trigger a synaptic firing in an inter-locutor insofar as there is a more or less matching but not identical lexical store of potential links derived from the shirt language (*sic*!).

Including sometimes the kind of parapraxis, typo, or dictation mis-hearing which thanks to my unreliable Dragon Dictate software has just produced that unexpected and odd phrase 'the shirt language', a notion which might now productively trigger an entertaining chain of creative fashion ideas rather more interesting than 'the shared language' which was my actual spoken phrase.

It is precisely such mistakes, misapprehensions, half-understandings, which can generate a lively and unpredictable conversation. Freud may have argued that linguistic mishaps can be the royal road to the unconscious, but they may also be fundamentally indicative of the kind of links constituted in and by a biological neural network, including creative and nonsensical

connections, unexpected associations and deteriorating linguistic competence. Especially when two or more biological neural networks are conversing over a drink.

My capacity for intelligent or at least intelligible speech is intrinsically dependent upon the dispersed capacities of other speakers of my language as well as the functioning of my own brain (or parts of it, or procedures within it) to recognise and imitate shared linguistic patterns. Taking turns, collaborating, and competing with each other, are characteristic and intrinsic features of language acquisition and exchange. There may be a sense in which the neural nets of several individuals can become discernibly intertwined with each other, a partly shared network, the neural connections within my own brain being directly activated by an utterance which might have been my own 'inner' speech but was actually an audible contribution from some other speaker, and while perhaps not wholly consonant with what I would have said myself yet nevertheless 'externally' modifying my own brain's network of connections. It's called a conversation. One might supplement Descartes: *cogitamus, ergo dico.* Simply reading solo to oneself is a variant of such neural 'sharing' even when what one is reading was written by oneself. As T. S. Eliot put it: 'my words echo thus in your mind'. The echo is a triggered synapse. Anselm's characteristic self-dialogues comprise echoes generated by and resonant in his own 'mind' as a text to be composed. Perhaps also recall here those Anselm letters which postulated 'soul sharing'.

Aristotelian biology regarded the various types of living entities as derived from previous living matter, a physical act initiating the internal causality of a living organism to realise itself. For Darwin, evolution shapes the biological characteristics of living species as primarily directed by the need to survive and reproduce. Which surely included the evolutionary benefits of a variable capacity for 'intelligence', however defined, and in the process generating the emergence of languages, however described or explained, especially in the human animal. Language, like reproduction itself, is transmitted from but not restricted to the prior language performances of others and any currently 'living' language has been vulnerably and (necessarily?) continuously transmitted and trans-formed from the moment of its tentative emergence, again not unlike the continuously modified linkage of surviving human DNA. For any 'living' language, like any living species, there has to have been a sharing chain going back to whatever legendary ancestors might be postulated, and though any individual language or species can become extinct, as von Humboldt's parrots remind us, 'inventing' a 'new' language is more problematic, even perhaps one designed for AI-speech. Or (recalling John Kirkby's fantasy novel) a solo infant growing up on an uninhabited island.

Language begins to be transmitted if not quite at birth but very soon after, and even perhaps to some extent as an immersive audio experience within the womb. A capacity for language is not an individual capacity or

simply a common feature of the human-animal species in the way that improved eyesight might characterise a particular genetic lineage or increased physical strength might be developed in an ethnic group, or certain forms of cultural activity might characterise a particular tribe. The capacity for actualising language is a capacity dependent upon others having a related and compatible but not necessarily identical capacity. Otherwise you could not be reading this, let alone 'understanding' it.

Yorick

So we should reconsider the 'Yorick' model of an AI or a brain, to emphasise the point that neuro-scientific inquiry cannot locate the capacity or the activity of language only inside an individual's skull by 'zooming in' however microscopically and however many individual brains are scanned. An individual human brain normally has to have a capacity to participate in the social activity which we call language and which itself is dependent upon physical means for generating it, primarily mouths and ears, but crucially including those of other people. The intrinsically social activity of language has its own causality, its mechanisms of development and evolution, investigation of which is difficult to coordinate with standard neuro-scientific experimental procedures, if only because of the technical difficulties of investigating the brain activities of several people participating simultaneously in a conversation (see for example the various studies in *Cognitive Neuroscience of Natural Language Use*, edited by Roel M Willems, 2015).

Moreover, the development of more complex language forms has evolved its own version of feedback, almost of back-propagation. Each speaker might almost be analogically regarded as an individual 'neuron' in a capacious neural network, since being active within a language community's neuro-social network involves being part of a reciprocal 'training' activity which is also a continuous modification process, unevenly distributed but potentially percolating throughout the overall network, as the historical content and chronologically dated attributions of the *Oxford English Dictionary* amply demonstrates. Including a potentially global or universal net-work since the development and interactions of languages cannot be restricted to solitary language groups or to a single location across the planet, as the proliferation of versions of 'English' has also demonstrated, and as the accumulating emergence of technological means of communication is now further manifesting. Even after the 'death' of a language community (how many now actually speak Scholastic Latin?), a language can indeed persist beyond the life of its producers precisely because as a kind of 'substantial form' it does not require a particular 'material' and can take 'forms' not only of sound but also parchment, paper, voice recordings, digital processes, et cetera. It is the formal and informal patterns of languages which survive.

There is no 'final cause'. No collective intention. No finished system. But there is a further built-in feedback process which generates and involves language about language, not just shared language but 'language squared', language reflected back upon itself, formulating questions, statements, hypotheses about language. Including thereby the generation of philosophical problems and literary innovation, creative inventions and self-cancelling aporias. In several treatises Aristotle has a great deal to say about some of the more complex domains or forms of language, including logic, rhetoric, dialectic, and his own philosophical approach was often focussed upon the elucidation of his predecessors' key terms, and in his own practice, including his technical quasi-neologisms, exemplifying the capacity of language for formulating questions about language's own expressions, particularly as used in everyday *doxa*, what ordinary people ordinarily say. Anselm's elaboration of his 'ontological proof' was generated precisely by a turning of language upon itself, an attempt to make sense of an elusive linguistic formulation which constituted an aporia, almost a *mise-en-abyme*: 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived.' The implications of which we are still considering.

vocatives again

As with questions about the nature of 'life' and how it 'began' we have considerable difficulty in even articulating appropriate questions about the 'origins' of language. (See for example *The First Word,* by Christine Kenneally, 2007) but indulging a deliberately quasi-mythical version may usefully highlight issues about language which will again take us back to Anselm, and especially to his use of a second-person or vocative mode of thinking.

The operation of language is sometimes assumed to be primarily propositional, statemental, declarative, or representational, as articulated in a third-person mode. In some necessarily speculative versions, the emergence of logic, obeying rules, expert learning, goal-seeking, our capacity to 'follow' an argument or find 'answers', and so on, all plausibly arose partly through an acquired ability literally to follow a path and to track the traces of an animal. Since early human necessary activities involved the locating and acquisition of food and water our remote ancestors had to learn at least one form of relationship between a sound and 'meaning' which emerged in basic forms of 'instruction'. Insofar as a mentor passed on the skills necessary to locate and eventually kill, say, a bison this code involved the 'quotation' of a sound or gestural term which 'indicated' a bison: what was transmitted proclaimed "this is a bison". What might 'stand in' for 'bison' could be a lump of clay, shaped or formed to 'look like' a bison, or an outline inscribed or incised, perhaps accompanied by an indicative sound. (See the classic *Gesture and Speech* by André Leroi-Gourhan, 1993).

The earliest 'demonstration' of how to approach or encircle a bison can be regarded as not unlike today's reminiscent soldiers demonstrating old battles, using whatever salt cellars or pieces of cutlery are available upon the table cloth. Being taught 'the knowledge' of where to hunt, to fish, to settle for the night, etc., was thus a rather early form of being instructed in the 'Knowledge' of a London taxi-driver. A crucial component of that learning and transmitting process would have been gestures or signs of negation: do *not* do it this way, do *not* take that path, and of a questioning in response: why not? Such meaning, as the French word *sens* registers, was primarily a matter of following a direction, preferably along the right route to the sought-after 'conclusion' or destination, and not taking a wrong path leading to a dead-end, a fatal full stop. In this version the core of Boolean logic and computer programming in the functions of *yes/no, either/or, and/or* has a very long history.

After some evolved processes of *ad hoc* transmissions of sounds, gestures, and images to convey necessary survival information and skills, a human animal would no longer have to recapitulate this practical apprenticeship, once a 'language' emerged to considerably reduce the time and effort required to enable relatively independent initiatives, though it still takes time to learn, necessarily, from others who have already learned. A language allows what one might call safe distance learning: being able to 'represent' the target of a hunt mitigates the need for dangerous on-the-spot training. A clay bison or a drawn lion on cave walls enables a shortish step to, or perhaps from, providing imagined images, memories of what has been learned, 'mental' images. Such images are and are not 'bison' or 'deer', as toy animals are and are not animals, and it becomes possible to ask 'Are these real?' The answer is both yes and no, *sic et non*, a differentiation between the toy bison or sketched antelope and that which (even if it has no name) we will encounter on the real hunt. We can learn to imagine or even draw diagrams or maps of the terrain and distinguish between going through the motions of hunting and actually hunting, even between dreaming of going hunting and imagining or remembering going hunting. Today we can use computer simulations for very similar quasi-instructional functions. Including video games for adolescents. And now we can endlessly study problems of truth and meaning or proposition and reference, to make retrospective sense, if that is the right word, of this entire development of such now irrecoverable hypothesised procedures (see for example *The Mind in the Cave* by David Lewis-Williams, 2002).

Including being able to indicate questions, however communicated: "Where does this lead?", "Will we find Y?", "Which is the right path to X?" Perhaps grunts characterised by a particular intonation which prompts for a reply, gestures a question mark. Yet once we have acquired that procedure we may mistakenly assume that being able to ask a question implies a possible answer, at least from some sage mentor. We may also assume that being able to address a demand requires a respondent. Or that, very

eventually, 'what we call God' may provide guidance, instruction, answers, revelation. How far this could transmute to a notion of the ultimately real bison, the model for all bisons, or maybe a great white shark, or a Great Hunter is even more beyond speculation.

Once it is possible, however, in whatever physical or audible form, to put a bison in quotation marks – this is a 'bison' but not a (real) bison – the route to putting an element of language itself into rudimentary quotation marks is open. Perhaps most necessarily in an exchange between two groups which have developed different vocalisations or gestures to indicate the same object : mutually interpretable sounds for 'bison' or perhaps decipherable hand-signs for 'that object' we are seeking, giving, exchanging. Eventually, even, for that than which a greater cannot be conceived.

An ability to propose and follow a plan of action, to articulate and coordinate the implementation of a task, the formulation and envisaging of a series of steps in a pursuit, the sequencing of items into some kind of order, may eventually have been developed into the structures of syntax and logic regarded as the culminating characteristic of human 'intelligence'. Such forms of language-use are in principle independent of any specific speaker, and are eventually summarisible, abstractable, and transferable. The knowledge or capacity embedded in particular tasks is transferred by teachable processes, if only by demonstrative example and commentary. Eventually, for example, Anselm's *De grammatico* enacts and instructs. A mediaeval 'expert system' for learning how to think in language.

It is mainly this highly speculative and disputable version of the origins of language and a corresponding emphasis upon these aspects or functions of language which can most readily be parsed by Chomskyan linguistics, treated systematically as Saussurean *langue*, regarded as abstractable from specific instances of *parole*, rendered into hypothetical 'mentalese', potentially transcribed into computable code, and even regarded as defining the core problem of 'consciousness' and 'intelligence' itself. And yet . . .

There is undoubtedly a 'masculinist' bias in the tendency to think of the evolutionary emergence of language as primarily developed from co-operative hunting and fighting, as predominantly male shared tasks of problem-solving, the receiving and transmitting of orders, the hunter-father instructing the pupil-son, the master training the apprentice, and so on, a combination of reason and authority, comprising the third-person articulation of 'objective' and 'known' social truths. It is the mode of language most consonant with both the received priorities of modern business modes of operating and planning and the dominant models of scientific research, including experimental neuroscience procedures and academic theoretical writing.

However. There is a rather different possible speculative account, more oriented to a 'second-person' version of the origins or development of language, and of society. Let us here assume a different gender bias if only because a neutral 'parent' is stylistically clumsy. The early relationship

between a mother and her infant child or children may be regarded as always having been the most basic and irreplaceable spur to the transformation of cries and sounds expressing needs into articulating 'sense' and the origin of 'words'. In this other imagined history, both ancient and current, mother-infant feed-back transforms extempore babbling into demand and response, exchange and messaging. We know that, say, dolphin mothers also address their offspring in baby talk. But perhaps because of the unusually extended dependence period of human infants, some form of extensive audible vocalisation was needed for an infant to continue to demand, to ask, and to thank, well beyond the dependency period required by most other species.

The most basic infant vocalisation of all was surely to cry, to demand, to ask, for mother's milk, and perhaps the most primitive human utterances were and are ways of indicating what in articulate language we might transcribe as "want" and "milk", not as proposition but as plea, petition, prompt, prod. A process of demanding both an object of desire and a response from an addressee: we want an answering response to our need before we can articulate asking for an answer to our questions. We must learn the skills of demanding and persuading before we learn the device of inquiring. Language emerged because the body required us to call out: Milk! Help! Please! and express gratitude and relief! Representation comes 'later', individually and socially, partly through the process of 'naming' those upon whom we call.

Moreover, this 'female' version of the ever-repeated formation of language – the personal recognition version, the call and response version, the flexible dialogical version, even the idiolect version – involves recognising *this* voice, perhaps in a language community primarily of only two, directly face-to-face. Language as shared construction. Improvised re-invention. Each reciprocally recognising a singular person. Perhaps the food of human language and of thought has always been most basically love, protection, care, desire, devotion, satisfaction, sleep, calm and melody.

An infant's interaction with its mother is multi-modal, involving eyes, noise, gesture, touch, smile, sucking, clinging, in which the absence of distinction between act, sign, and meaning is deeply akin to that between usage and rule in everyday language: the repeated pattern is the sense, the persistent use is the meaning. Perhaps many other animal species did not develop a 'fuller' language because of a far less extended time-frame for mother-infant dependent interactivity.

One intriguing dubious argument proposed that the gradual human loss of body fur in globally warming climates significantly reduced the ability of the human child to cling securely to a mobile mother, thereby increasing regular physical separation and thus infant anxiety. Audible noise interactions at a distance become the most available and effective ('signifying') form of demand, as the spatial gap further increases between mother and infant with the child's own developing mobility, which then

faces a choice whether to go to the mother or demand more insistently that she come to it, involving acute awareness of dependence and contingency. No wonder the first gods to be appealed to and placated were maternal.

Of course, such a 'folk explanation' in terms of 'motherese' has been given short shrift by those who favour other accounts focused on imperative instructions for huntin' and fishin'. However, both modes profoundly persist, though the 'male' functions of language receive most emphasis in theoretical thinking about human communication and indeed as characterising 'thinking' itself. Yet the putatively more maternal-emotional mode of linguistic address and appeal, of cry and response, remains a primary and persistent component of all forms of human language, as ineradicable as the demand for affirmative comfort, however imaginary at times the addressee, the second-person "you" or the You from whom we insistently claim recognition.

What is then worth emphasising is that Anselm's persuasive yet elusive core argument powerfully blends both modes, combining and conflating an emotional 'you' mode of affective personal address, an imagined construction and demand, with an ostensibly logical, formally objective, grammatically third-person argument, based upon the self-reflective capacity of a peculiar linguistic formulation. Not surprisingly Anselm also encouraged and popularised fervent prayers to the Virgin Mother. It is also not surprising that most smart assistants we address as 'you' reply in a reassuringly female voice.

We might further explore the notion that what mediates between body or brain and mind is not 'spirit' but language, as Anselm's language 'mediates' not only between himself and his God but between Anselm and ourselves, across time and absence, still addressed to an imaginary reader, ourselves. Among the areas affected by any thinking about thinking is the issue of how evolution developed to produce not only language and what we call mind or consciousness, but also the nature of religious belief itself. One facet of language which is highlighted by thinking about Anselm's 'proof' is not so much the propositional function of language but rather the peculiar importance of the capacity for second-person vocative address, including address to our 'self'. It is again the 'you' version of Anselm's argument that is most suggestive for thinking about what we call thinking.

When we send out probes into space with messages and time-capsules, that action makes sense only if we think that the existence of an alien intelligence is at least possible. We are not, however, fundamentally looking for an answer to the question 'Do aliens exist?' but rather for some kind of response or reply to our question addressed to 'them': "Do you exist? Are you there?" We are offering a dialogue: "We are here – please respond". Though there was perhaps no excuse for including Mozart's *Requiem* among the contents of our far-flung capsule vocative. That, as the man said, was just boasting.

We can now reconsider, again, the 'Yorick' model for neuroscience and artificial intelligence. It is possible, by emphasising the socio-material processes of shared language use, to favour a different framework for the relationship between the human brain and 'thinking'. If the term 'thinking' indicates those human activities in which we 'understand' and 'mean what we say' to each other, we may begin to regard the relation between the brain and language, in the actual activities of talking, listening, writing, communicating, as no more fundamentally 'mysterious' than the relationship between the brain and, say, running.

We should focus not so much on solitary mental jogging as on such complex multi-faceted collective forms of running as, say, playing a football game - an interesting model, incidentally, not just for a lively conversation on a contested topic but for what one might, with tongue in cheek, call reciprocally self-modifying layers of dynamic interaction between two inter--communicating neural nets: the two teams constantly changing positions. But I'll pass on that.

One hard problem may be due precisely because of conceiving of 'thinking' as a kind of individual exercise, a solo activity, rather than as taking part in a multi-player game, indeed a language game, even if one person or brain sometimes 'plays' both teams. A very old formulation characterised thinking as the mind's conversation with itself, *dianoia*, an example of which we clearly have in Anselm's own account of his thinking and indeed his preference for a Platonic dialogue form of treatise. A cogitating conversation with oneself is a somewhat sophisticated version of a normal conversation with others.

There is rightly an almost automatic resistance in neuro-science and science generally to deploying any notion of a 'spirit' or even talk of a 'mental' operation. Neither a living biological neuron nor an artificial neural node can be credibly attributed with a 'soul', though the cell of a neuron is itself a living process and each neuron can undertake complex functions which enable some acquisition of 'knowledge' as a function of large parts of the brain. We are familiar, for example, with electrical configurations operating as forms of storage (a hard drive, a CD-ROM, the sounds issuing from a music CD) and the transmission of electrical signals travelling through various gates or sub-processes and sub-circuits in order to light up a bulb or trigger a phone call in a telephone exchange. But we would not call a telephone exchange intelligent. So where does 'intelligence' come from? How does the multiplication and reconfiguration of neural connections somehow conjure up intelligent activity?

One current temptation, following an even more Cartesian direction or cul-de-sac, is to reformulate the notion of the 'spiritual', 'mental', or the 'soul', as 'self-consciousness', or self-awareness, sometimes regarded as a kind of subjectively recognisable flicker, preferably measurable and

recordable as a complex physical feedback which can be instrumentally registered even when an activity is not actually 'conscious to' the aware self. A process which occurs, yet again, 'inside' Yorick.

If we suggest a different kind or level of analysis and explanation for exploring the relationship between the human brain and thinking, by bringing into the investigation the socio-material activities or processes of language exchange, we might even include those which are generated by mis-understandings of each other's language, let alone accidental parapraxes or slips of the tongue. Perhaps thinking of thinking as more like the collective operation by multiple drivers who momentarily constitute the actual 'traffic flow' in a crowded city rather than as a neatly organised map for an artificially intelligent autonomous driver.

The obvious point is that what we call thinking is most often a form of response to what other people are thinking, writing, and saying to us. There even seems to be some evidence that we are more or less programmed to 'say something' but to say something different in an autonomous response process. We speak to other people even if silently and even if the other people are all 'myself'. A great deal of actual 'thinking', particularly of an everyday kind, exists not inwardly but 'out there', not the invisible work of an immaterial 'spirit', but a public exchange, a dialogue materially generated by gesture, facial expression, overall bodily behaviour, by sound waves, by muscles palpably at work in lips and throat, tongue and ear.

The relation of those organs to brain activities can indeed be tracked, measured, scanned, digitised. Unfortunately, several people having an impromptu pub conversation cannot easily fit into an fMRI scanner. There are undeniably formidable technological and methodological limits to using current monitoring equipment to do anything other than concentrate upon an individual brain, even if many such solitary brains are later compared. Partly as a result, there is an implicit working assumption that most brains conform to a certain pattern which can be mapped by equipment designed to be attached to an individual brain. Though there is the occasional exception: it was recently rumoured that the entire Liverpool football team were seen on the practice ground all wearing EEG helmets – though the reason was never disclosed.

The social activity of 'thinking' is not essentially located at a determinate spot, a single brain, but distributed through space and time, and increasingly shared through various supplementary non-bodily media of communication. Thinking is most basically a decidedly material activity, in the exchanges of speech and listening, writing and reading, even in that strange conflation of the two which transforms my spoken words into computerised text, for which I again offer thanks (or otherwise) to my more or less (un)reliable dictation software: your guest is as good as mine ask to what this entrance originally said. Or the next. The human brain works by predictive text to. Please correct.

However, once we focus on the social character of language as the 'input' appropriate to what we call the intellect, we might even mischievously speculate on how 'shared' thinking might be modelled. Infamously, David Hume offered the image of a game of billiards as encapsulating a certain model of causality, with the billiard balls physically striking and ricocheting off each other. We can perhaps imagine two or more adjacent snooker tables on which separate games are being played, with the balls continually bouncing around the cushions and falling into pockets on each separate table. If the cushions dividing the tables are then removed the balls from one game can intermittently interfere with and impact upon any game(s) being played on the other table(s), and vice versa. The Hume-like trajectory of a ball on one table may be directly influenced by the weighted impact of one or several balls converging from various tables combined. The surrealistically incalculable results may be physically determined while appearing to the players neither intentional nor predictable. Zooming in on the actions of only one player would be patently myopic. Though Schrodinger's cat might learn to play a quantum-entangled version of the game. Perhaps called a seminar.

One can envisage a lively conversation in which my own activity of articulating what I am 'thinking' is the result of some 'inward' neural processes constructing a network of connections within my own physical brain, a firing of my synapses triggered by the relative weight of whatever neural links are in play in my head and I might articulate my thinking in some appropriate audible sounds. Yet as I also see and hear the responses of any conversational partners the sounds of what he or she is saying also have the triggering effect of firing my own synapses. The overarching neural networks and effectively combined links which are thereby constructed are partly constituted by patterns of connection specific to my own memories and associations and partly by his or hers. And vice versa. My jejune comments, however anodyne, might even have the effect of triggering some otherwise highly unlikely associations in the synaptic firings of a conversational companion, literally 'making connections' he or she would never have 'thought of'.

It is after all a fairly common experience of improvisational exchange, perhaps especially in a pub or other occasions for fruitfully or fuzzily misunderstanding one's interlocutors. Of course, this assumes that to some extent we share the 'same' language. Listening however intently to the sounds made by a gorilla may sadly fire very few synapses in my own brain, except alarming memories. Of course, on this model listening only to one's own voice can be singularly unfruitful. Solipsistic thinking is rarely productive. It partly depends on how many other voices are already in one's head.

If thinking primarily 'comes from' reacting to other people's thinking, as life comes from previous life and physical motion from physical impact, the residual intriguing puzzles are primarily those of ancient origins. A matter,

as in Aristotle, of natural history. And as with Darwinian origins and the cosmic Big Bang, we can trace some processes to a previous state yet remain unclear about how 'language' 'began', but the puzzle is not most usefully regarded as a question of how a single innovative brain somehow individually generated a wholly novel linguistic capacity.

Nevertheless, a Cartesian or 'Yorick' notion of the individual soul or mind as what constitutes our unique identity as a 'person' still underpins widespread 'common sense' notions about 'thinking' and language. That persistent model might eventually be replaced by a different common sense account of individual identity, in terms of each unique combination of a neural net, dual-inherited DNA, and a specific bio-social history, which together constitute the singularly individuated history of a particular human being. An auto-bio-graphy. Thinking might still be regarded, not as derived from an invisible spiritual entity, but nevertheless as inward, individual, and even immaterial, if one regards a brain's neural net as inward, a specific DNA combination as astonishingly unique, and the activities of language and culture as not 'material' in the way a brick is material, but as characteristically human social processes which are embodied in, given shape and structure (form) as, a variety of material apparatuses, including not only the body's own physical organs but also the material structures of social communication. It is the latter emphasis and implications I want to explore later by returning to another aspect of Aristotle's and Anselm's texts.

unicorns

We can now leave these speculations aside and briefly consider a further slice of my admittedly somewhat over-concise ambling history of philosophy. During the long sway of the 'standard model' of Scholastic thinking and its dominance in professional university departments of philosophy and theology, including its indirect influence in several other disciplines, what I want to designate as the "you" mode or component of Anselm's own thinking was largely relegated to having a role only in the pious practice of prayer and to some extent in popular preaching.

Despite the formally dialogical character of disputations, Scholastic argument was regarded as fundamentally propositional, putatively objective, and ostensibly impersonal. In practice, the agreed starting points for much Scholastic theological thinking and disputation tended to be the already established doctrinal positions and formulations of 'the church' so that argumentative dialogue or 'dialectic' was the norm, as distinct from either strict logic or merely persuasive rhetoric. If an argument claiming to be properly scientific, or epistemic, had to be conducted from 'agreed' first principles or 'self-evident' premises, on the other hand what Aristotle had referred to as *doxa* – the common positions of ordinary understanding from which only a merely 'dialectical' argument can be pursued – tended to be subordinated to the pronouncements and premises of church *dogma*. The

outstanding modern Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, regularly proposed his often radically revisionist 'theological investigations' as if they were simply logical elaborations upon or clarifications of received doctrinal statements.

It is worth emphasising that, after the domination of Aquinas's mode of systematic articulation, various 14th century scholastics developed their own approaches and positions which often revolved around explicitly logical issues, as in the work of Duns Scotus or William of Ockham. Indeed, the very definition of what was to count as rigorous thinking tended to take the form of ever more elaborate inquiries into the nature of propositional and modal logic. One might argue that the Scholastic mode of disputation, systematically considering negative and positive arguments concerning a specific 'question', degenerated into irresolvable disputes while nevertheless arguably anticipating in some respects a later more respectably 'scientific' mode of relentless inquiry and systematised thinking. Logic by itself can't constitute an argument without the premises being themselves validated: only if the premises are true can the conclusion be also guaranteed true, and false premises can logically prove false conclusions. Unless one can provide somehow self-evident premises.

This summary characterisation of developments immediately after Anselm could be further situated within a wider history of philosophy and 'thinking'. The 'Scholastic' mode was the target of later repudiation, as modes of philosophical writing during the humanist renaissance took different fashionable forms, with a revival of Neoplatonist positions and a preference for the elegant essay genre of Cicero rather than what was increasingly dismissed as the arid rigour of formal disputation.

The late mediaeval Aristotelian or Thomist mode had attempted systematically to adduce allegedly self-evident or generally agreed premises upon which to sustain an argument, as in Aquinas's appeal to observable features of the physical world to construct a chain of argument which constitutes an explanation in terms of 'what we call God'. This approach could be challenged by questioning the initial observational premise as insufficiently scientific, and by the sequence of reasoning being dismissed as mere logic-chopping or semantic knitting.

In any case the combination of several such arguments could lead to an overall incompatibility between the conclusions of different chains of reasoning as, for example, in denoting irreconcilable facets, aspects, or characteristics of 'what we call God'. One might label this the 'Unicorn' problem or the inevitable issue of distinguishing and discriminating between different uses of terms, a constant preoccupation of scholastics. One argument can show that 'what we call a unicorn' exists, in the realm of entrepreneurial investments, while another demonstrates that a 'unicorn' figures in certain legends, yet a sure-fire billion-dollar company is not the same as a horse with a horn on its head, any more than the cause of the 'big bang' (financial or cosmological) is necessarily the same kind of entity as the

ultimate object of one's desire for happiness, still less to be further identified as a voice speaking from a burning bush.

Aquinas was of course well aware of this linguistic slippage but when he concludes his 'five ways' each with a variation on the phrase 'what we call God' he is nevertheless deploying a single term to reference a possible variety of entities, a conclusion which may ultimately reflect only an incoherent ordinary usage of 'what we call' 'God' (or indeed in Latin 'the' or 'a' god, *deus*).

Several of the aporias and problems in the development of Christian doctrine arguably arose from attempts to combine distinct philosophical and theological approaches, thereby disclosing a degree of incompatibility between them, as in the Nicaean Council's attempts to formulate the implications of the New Testament narratives in terms drawn from Greek philosophical vocabulary, as succinctly traced in Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea* (1976), or St Augustine's Neoplatonic re-workings of Nicean doctrine in the *De trinitate*.

In this longer perspective, Anselm's way of thinking in the *Proslogion* can be regarded as attempting to offer a mode of argument which entirely avoids the familiar difficulties of such approaches. In seeking a single self-justifying premise and intrinsically self-contained argument articulated in the phrase 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' Anselm was trying to evade the vulnerabilities of other theological methods. But his partial separating out of philosophical or strictly rational arguments helped shape the way in which subsequent thinkers approached the task of 'theology', including the increasingly professional requirement that one should study not only the humanities (grammar, syntax, rhetoric, logic, dialectic) but also the almost autonomous discipline of 'philosophical' thinking.

Ironically, it was partly through distinguishing between philosophical and theological inquiry that a basis was later developed for undermining the kind of systematic programme represented by Aquinas's *Summa*. Aquinas had sought to combine the newly disseminated range of Aristotelian texts with the dominantly Platonic theological tradition which had previously imbued so much Christian thinking, but insofar as the result could be seen as an attempted synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology the combination became liable primarily to a critique or rejection of its Aristotelian cosmological and scientific component.

As the once authoritative positions and arguments of Aristotle himself were increasingly rejected on grounds of scientific inadequacy, so the later Scholastic reliance upon a particular mode of philosophical argument was seen as increasingly discrediting that overall syncretist endeavour. At the same time, the consolidation of an autonomous territory of disciplined thinking called 'philosophy' led to an initially confident reliance upon the resources of what was regarded as 'reason' construed as operating according to its own non-theological procedures and premises, its intrinsic rationality.

In that context Anselm's 'ontological argument' acquired its curious status as a rare remnant of 'mediaeval' reasoning accorded some continuing post-mediaeval attention within a 'modern' strictly philosophical tradition.

Yet, in the development of confident scientific investigation, the status and authority of 'philosophical' reasoning was itself increasingly challenged. Just as areas of inquiry, or issues and problems, which had once been deeply shaped by theological formulations and pre-suppositions were displaced by 'rational' philosophical arguments, so too the self-reliance of philosophy upon its own procedures and postulates was displaced by increasingly self-assured scientific disciplines which claimed to have even more cogent answers to such issues as the nature of reality, the composition of life, the origins of the cosmos, and how we we should think about such matters. Most recently, developments in neuroscience and computing have challenged the very notion that philosophical 'thinking' or even 'human reason' itself has any exceptional status or authority. Philosophy departments have thus been extensively dissolved. Some claims concerning 'artificial intelligence' have postulated a scenario in which human reasoning is to be displaced and surpassed and, like theology in its day, dislodged from its throne. So do we again have to re-think 'thinking'? Including artificial thinking?

artificial thinking

After the rejection both of the Scholastic systems of thinking and the authority of ecclesiastical dogma, two broad tendencies developed in European thinking about religion, and with it thinking about thinking. One trajectory attempted to succeed where Aquinas's Aristotelian synthesis was judged to have failed, by once more providing a rationally persuasive argument for the existence of a 'supreme being' but now without endorsing specifically Christian doctrine. This Deist tendency was broadly contented with a conception of the Supreme Being as an abstractly impersonal Entity, and made little attempt to incorporate or accommodate notions of a divine person derived from biblical narratives in which such a character figured. A Deist deity was hardly to be intimately addressed as "you". Anselm's 'ontological argument' sometimes featured in this search for impersonal philosophical 'proofs' of divine existence, with little emphasis upon or concern for the affective appeal or otherwise of his actual arguments. The attempt in the French revolutionary period to erect Reason itself as a secular divinity was perhaps one unconvincing culmination of this effort.

At the same time, negative reaction to increasing philosophical scepticism concerning the very possibility of such a supreme being was combined with the impact of growing critico-historical investigations into the received texts of Scripture, as in Richard Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament,* 1681. Arguably, one of the long-term impacts of Abelard's construction in *Sic et non* of apparently incompatible authoritative textual statements was the

development of increasingly specialist disciplines which sought to propose philological solutions, critical elucidations, or historical interpretations, in order to provide plausible explanations for particular contradictory positions found in the received biblical texts. The accumulation of such multi-disciplinary investigations tended to transform the character of professional biblical interpretation, as eventually in 19th-century Higher Criticism.

In response, on the other hand, many religious believers denied or evaded the challenge of philosophical and historical critique by increasingly affirming a reliance upon a singularly faith-driven and faith-justified appeal to a literal or fundamentalist reading and acceptance of their selectively designated 'sacred scriptures', combined sometimes with an explicitly or defiantly non-rational personal conviction of theological certainty, seemingly based upon individual emotional identification or asserted self-confidence. The latter tendency arguably underpins aspects of Karl Barth's influential mid-20th-century interpretation of Anselm's 'argument' as fundamentally an elaboration upon his prior faith commitment. The phrase *fides quaerens intellectum* was interpreted as a confirmatory two-stage process based upon an existential premise.

A different influential response specifically to Anselm was legible in the formidable work of Immanuel Kant whose philosophical trajectory arguably began specifically from his reaction to reading a version of Anselm and puzzling over the status of an argument (it was Kant who labelled it 'the ontological proof') which seemed to construct an apparently purely logical argument which nevertheless magicked up an ostensibly empirical statement, an analytical statement which purported to prove a factual claim, a combination of *a priori* and *synthetic* judgements. After Kant's early attempt at his own 'ontological argument' it became central to his entire oeuvre to clarify the status of such *synthetic a priori* statements.

It is perhaps worth offering a compressed aside, which can be wholly ignored, about the status of language within this overall development. Anselm and Descartes used everyday language to formulate their positions, not mathematical argument or symbolic logic. 20th century European philosophy can be regarded as developing along two main lines. The introspective 'first person' or auto-biographical mode of Descartes modulated into early 20th century phenomenology, with its emphasis upon describing inward processes of consciousness, as in Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* and his explorations of 'internal time consciousness' and thence to Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Leibniz's account of the ontological proof, and more generally the logical or computerisable forms of the 'laws of thought', can be categorised as a 'third-person' endeavour, putatively impersonal, not dependent upon any specific individual's personal experience. That ambition can be tracked from Leibniz to Frege, Russell, and early Wittgenstein, and to the cul-de-sac of Gödel in the philosophy of mathematics.

Both developments arguably ended with a turn to dissecting the intractable aporias of language. Derrida's early critique of Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* eventually spawned his scintillatingly deconstructive convolutions of language, not just exploring Kantian conceptual antinomies but probing the impasses and self-disentanglings of linguistic formulations generated by the embedded implications in language itself. Meanwhile, Wittgenstein's quasi-logical formal austerity in the *Tractatus* eventually modulated into his almost colloquial dismantlings of the ways in which language traps us like flies in a fly bottle, bemused by the limits of the everyday language we can learn to use but cannot go 'beyond'. For Wittgenstein the primary mis-step to be challenged was the assumption that a word and its 'meaning' were of the same kind, like a market commodity and its price, rather than a cow and its various uses. Each critique focused primarily upon a limited range of the uses of language, in particular Derrida's emphasis upon written philosophical-literary texts and Wittgenstein's on conversational idiom and common-place remarks. But if language is such a crucial element in any version of what we normally call thinking, trying to understand language in relation to the individual brain has mainly kept us buzzing inside the fly bottle. In one gnomic remark, however, Wittgenstein envisaged future philosophy as primarily a 'natural history of language'. The early Derrida might have developed a *sic et non* elaboration of the same approach.

interpellation – heh you!

Eventually, it was not natural history but the emergence of anthropological or sociological modes of inquiry which suggested not only the 'scientific' displacement of theological claims but an undercutting of religious belief generally, and a re-formulation of the task of 'philosophy'. In particular, the work of Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 1841, argued that religious belief is fundamentally a 'projection' of human desires, hopes, and values, and that belief in a divinity has derived from our attributing to an imaginary being powers which we have extrapolated from the characteristics and capacities of human beings themselves. The 'analogical' arguments of Thomist approaches could thus be (simplistically) critiqued as variations upon the claim that we can use, for example, the word 'cause' of 'God', in ways illicitly exported from how we use the same term in relation to human causality. Above all perhaps, we have attributed a notion of person-hood to 'that which we call God' in such a way that we are drawn to address that person in terms of 'you'. Not unlike Anselm constructing the addressees of his letters and imagining a *persona* for God himself.

Partly deriving from the influence of Feuerbach, one early strand in the Marxist tradition developed attempts not only to 'explain' religious belief systems but to analyse all modes of thinking as inherently 'ideological',

including much of the received philosophical tradition itself. On this view, the arguments made for and against belief in 'God' were as much the intellectual bye-product, however indirect and mediated, of particular social interests and contradictions as were any more directly political and economic theories.

However, what all such tendencies to some extent retained was the intellectualist notion that a belief in a divine person or Supreme Being involved and required an 'idea' or 'concept' which gave the term 'God' or its variants a content which could be intellectually specified and justified. Even biblical fundamentalists vigorously defended quite specific (if variable) notions of what the term 'God' had to mean. However, neither doctrinal statements nor dogmatic definitions were necessarily seen as the most crucial component of practising religious 'faith', since moral behaviour, liturgical rituals, or emotional response might well be regarded and experienced as more central or authentic manifestations of 'belief' than a capacity to formulate 'clear and distinct' conceptions of the deity.

Nevertheless, Feuerbach and early Marx tended to think of 'ideologies' primarily as clusters or systems of 'ideas' to which people gave assent, however inchoately. The young Marx began his life's work with a critique of religious and philosophical thinking, eventually elaborating a systematic and 'scientific' analysis of 'political economy' as the intellectual articulation of the operative tenets of modern capitalist society. On this account religious beliefs might be regarded as formulated in a *Summa* or in *Thirty Nine Articles* while political ideologies could be subjected to a logical critique.

In a significant change of emphasis, the 1960s the revisionist Marxist Louis Althusser elaborated a different critical framework. Althusser had been educated within a French Catholic ambience of derivately neo-Scholastic philosophical instruction and had cut his political teeth as an active member of Christian youth organisations, and one can see, still permeating his later psychoanalytical and structuralist arguments, a continuing theoretical debt to such traditional Thomist notions as the distinction between the 'formal object' and 'material object' in any properly 'scientific' inquiry. The main theoretical shift proposed by Althusser was to regard 'ideology' primarily in terms not of concepts or 'ideas' but of what he characterised as a process of 'interpellation'.

The term indicates that we are 'addressed' and put into our place as a certain kind of 'subject' by the operations of various 'ideological apparatuses', including those of formal education and institutional religion. Rather than ostensibly impersonal third-person 'objective' (but ideological) 'truth claims' about the nature of reality, or subjective investigations into first-person experience as pursued by variants of phenomenology or existentialism, Althusser focussed upon the second-person linguistic operation, the vocative appeal or address to "you" and the process of constructing a 'you' amenable to the capitalist economic and social formation. We are summoned to occupy socio-economic positions as we

might be 'called' by our name in the street, and insistently addressed vocatively, as a categoriseable 'you'.

On this account, to be 'put in one's place' as a student whose defining function is diligently to learn and to pass exams operates as a more effective form of social control and manipulation than the propagation of any specific contents of textbooks, lectures, sermons or manifestoes. The religious apparatus similarly 'interpellates' each of us, addresses us as being already implicitly practising or merely lapsed 'believers', and persuades us to acknowledge ourselves as such by positioning us in specific forms of behaviour and self-identification, rather than by theological argument or dogmatic conviction.

Thus the articulated elaborations of ideological 'positions' have their implicit primary premise located not in a theoretical principle or intellectual argument, which might be vigorously refuted, but as a practical reinforcement of an already-existing social location or economic situation upon which the apparent logic of the confirmatory 'ideology' arises precisely as a justification or explanation for being already in that position, and staying in it.

The most visible and pervasive form of 'interpellation' characteristic of capitalist 'ideological' positioning is encapsulated in constant and inescapable consumer advertising of various kinds, the insistent summons to purchase commodities. That 'you' have no alternative to food-shopping, other than starvation, combines with less explicit 'commonsensical' notions that each of us is already appropriately situated in our 'given' job position, within a class hierarchy which is itself to be 'taken for granted' as allowing no systemic alternative 'you' can conceive. Pervasive billboards and persistent television advertising constantly address us as already acknowledging and accepting our class position by our very act of unavoidably looking desiringly at what we need to consume but can hardly afford. Such interpellation is embedded in the ambient social apparatus and increasingly in the everyday familiar technology we can in practice barely do without or escape from. A smartphone is a highly versatile interpellation apparatus. Which constantly and insistently addresses us. As Anselm's daily habitual activities as a monk underpinned and sustained the credibility of his self-addressed 'proof'.

The influence of Althusser himself has waned, together with an overall decline in attempts to construct oppositional philosophical, political, or economic positions. Nevertheless, this way of understanding religious belief as based upon 'interpellation', encapsulated in an implicit 'address' rather than as a set of propositions, remains useful.

For example, the process of projected address can be seen as formally reciprocal, so that belief in certain attributed characteristics of the divine entity are reinforced by different forms of our 'answering' address to that divinity. The generic *sotto voce* prayer "God help me!" reinforces the claim that my God is greater than yours, in that he can be called upon to act on

my side, as I might call upon my big brother. The implicit plea "choose me, me, me" enforces a firm confidence that I am more 'chosen' by God than others are, that I am his preferred favourite, as in versions of Israel's claims or the assumptions of American exceptionalism – "God bless America!" Rhetorically, all forms of advertising address imply, subtly or otherwise, that each of us is somehow singled out as a 'special' customer.

By contrast, what we call 'science' is not 'addressed' to nature or the universe but regards its object of inquiry as non-personal, examined by investigations in which we are not asking anyone except ourselves for answers, and the kind of 'answer' we seek is not a personal reply or response. For some religious believers, however, the 'answer' to life, the universe, and everything, is decidedly not a solution to any equations, even the 'number 42' as calculated by the super-computer Deep Thought in *Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy,* but an 'answer' to a prayer, a response even if in a silent mode, an ongoing and perhaps admittedly one-sided 'conversation', not the formulation of a problem to which there might be a logical or even rational solution.

We frequently encounter on advertising hoardings the proselytising Christian question: "Are you looking for an answer?" To which one's *sotto voce* reply might well be: "Can we agree on the question?" When a parent responds to an insistently inquisitive offspring the core of the child's inquiry may not be to elicit information but to evoke a response to a more basic demand: "Answer me! Notice me!" Though the child may well persist asking for 'answers' in the spirit of: "I will get a response out of you if I try hard enough." Of course, a child who finds that the parent, or divinity, does not respond or remains silent may well infer that it is the child's own fault. Belief of a religious kind might be regarded as consisting primarily in thinking that you have somehow had or are perhaps about to have a reply, a response in some form, an answer to a prayer, even a miracle.

Defoe's Robinson Crusoe thinks he has been given a direct intervention from the Almighty, and therefore that the Almighty must exist, when he discovers the apparently miraculous growth of seeds on his island. He offers a fervent thanks. Only to realise later that there is a rational explanation which need not after all indicate a response from an unseen divine addressee. Though whether his scientific account is then itself an indirect sign of an invisible beneficent ordering remains tantalisingly open in Defoe's text. There is no way of course for a reader to find the 'right' answer, since the text is fiction and even the author cannot claim to know the truth of the matter any more than Shakespeare knew how many children Lady Macbeth had.

self-interpellations

As my own reader you may by now be asking 'me' , in some exasperation, why you and this 11th-century text by Anselm have been subjected to such

a lengthy, wandering, and recursive commentary. I am, I acknowledge, constructing something more like a neural net configuration of multiple links rather than a single logical chain, or perhaps operating in a way that Anselm indicates as appropriate for meditating: chew by thinking, suck by understanding. And even now I want to suggest a few more contexts in which to think about Anselm's work, because the structures and devices operative in Anselm's *Proslogion* seem to me distinctly legible in some current political and technological developments.

In particular, I have intermittently been suggesting a relationship between Anselm's mode of argument and some features of 'artificial intelligence'. The problematic issue of 'understanding' indicates a kind of structural similarity, between the question of whether an AI 'understands' and how Anselm himself understood the phrase 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' as referring not just to a concept but to an actually existing God. That an AI 'understands' can imply a reference to an external reality, to what is being understood: can an autonomous vehicle reliably input external traffic conditions, is an AI capable of somehow matching its internal workings with reality. A variant on the Kantian problematic.

The argument of the *Proslogion* and the conclusions of an AI can both be treated as primarily 'internalised' operations. The core procedure of the *Proslogion* is self-interpellation, Anselm addressing himself in the *persona* of God and as such providing himself with the crucial formula, that phrase which offers a redefinition of God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. In effect, that phrase is proposed as a self-evident premise which already encapsulates a necessary conclusion, eventually made evident to and by Anselm himself. From this self-provided starting-point the rest of the *Proslogion* proceeds, constructing an extended circular loop which finally not only elucidates but confirms that initial claimed insight.

Aquinas was in that respect correct to pair Anselm's argument with that of John of Damascus, as relying upon 'self-evidence'. One could categorise such an argument as essentially self-supporting, self-sustaining, even as solipsistic. And this might also be claimed of the intrinsically internalised operations of a computer, though there is a difference between a computer program constructed as rigorously defined operating instructions with systematically valid links in the code sequence, and the 'large language model' of a neural net artificial intelligence, a difference to which we can return.

The interesting political comparison with Anselm's procedure is that once Anselm has established his innovative starting point as confirmed by the self-reinforcing loop of speaking in the *persona* of God to himself, he could draw upon, but had no continuing need for, a confirmation of traditional doctrines or assertions about the nature of God. His self-generated premise is the ultimate retrospective justification for his own selective elaboration of the premise as the basis for his personal theological positions. Similarly, once a self-declared prophet claims a direct revelation from the divine, this

personal 'illumination' can take precedence over or selectively incorporate received traditions, provided any new 'revelation' is accepted by sufficient adherents who endorse and sustain the prophet as an authentic 'messenger', and thereby begin to constitute themselves as a new community, sect, or cult. The crucial initiating move is a form of self-interpellation: Anselm speaks as God to himself as 'you', the prophet addresses himself as divinely inspired by the message he proclaims. What partly binds together the ensuing 'believers' as a new community is that they are persistently addressed or interpellated as constituting a new 'you'. Which will most securely happen if a sufficiently uncritical media endorsing the 'messenger' becomes the closed horizon from within which the followers' assessment of the original 'message' is conducted. 'Believing in' the Bible and the Koran both provided such a context.

Meanwhile, in the political domain it can be the self-defined but largely undeclared 'self-interest' of an individual leader which can operate as the equivalent of a 'self-evident' premise, underpinning a declared overall political direction, even if that ostensible position is actually mistaken, misperceived, or cynically self-deceiving. The followers or adherents are persuaded to equate their own self-interest with the leader's, in a mode of identification sustained to a considerable extent through the leader's control over the available media and its deployment in a persistent interpellation of the addressed 'you' as already aligned and identified with the leader. It is often pivotal that the encompassing media available to those followers becomes more and more supportive of and restricted to the dissemination of the leader's own self-presentation, orchestrated to provide a persistently reinforcing conflation of the addressed 'you' with the leader's own identity.

A pattern has recently emerged of sometimes initially maverick political leaders, including relative outsiders to any traditional elite formation, who have been able partly through extensive media influence, manipulation, and control, to establish a political apparatus, focused upon and dependent upon a single individual. Their political success is partly based upon the construction of a sufficiently large following by in effect addressing them in the manufactured *persona* of the One who articulates their own self-interests, and in this schema it is the self-interest of the charismatic leader which operates as the equivalent of a self-evident premise. It is again crucial that the encompassing media available to those followers becomes more and more supportive of and restricted to the dissemination of that judgement.

Recent examples would include Berlusconi, Orban, Erdogan, Netanyahu, Jair Messias (sic) Bolsonaro, Modi, and Trump. This model is somewhat distinct from previous political formations whereby a political leader represented himself or herself as the authorised or accredited spokesperson of an already established political community, organisation, policy, or ideology, which sought electoral validation or mass acclaim to act on behalf of a significant pre-existing segment or faction within the population as a whole. What has been increasingly prominent is the interpretation of

collective political interests in terms of the power, career, and prospects of a single individual, whose motivation is sometimes transparently self-interested, not only in seeking power and wealth but in some cases primarily wanting to gain or maintain political power in order to ensure immunity from possible criminal charges. One might add a variety of *coup d'états* by military leaders who rapidly become familiar versions of such self-interested dictators. It is the assonances between current modes of political adherence and structures of religious assent which now seem more frequent and entrenched.

Such a convergence of religious and political modes is hardly new, considering the role of the papacy and of the divine right of kings throughout the Middle Ages and Reformation, not to mention Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Ataturk, etc. In some current instances there is a quite explicit coalescence of religion, politics, and nationalism. An obvious instance would be Modi's deployment of and reliance upon an attempt to construct a version of 'Hinduism' as a 'religion' on the model of the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic formations (see the ambitious argument of S. N. Balagangadhara *The Heathen in his Blindness*, 1994). One can critically compare Modi's revisionist and reactionary version of 'Hinduism' with the traditional stance portrayed in the extraordinary Telegu autobiography *The Last Brahmin* by Rani Siva Sankara Sarma, and given socio-cultural context by the far-reaching work of D. Venkat Rao in his *Cultures of Memory in South Asia*, 2014.

A comparison might also be made with Netanyahu's self-serving implementation of ultra-Zionist claims of divine justification for Israel's ever-expanding occupation of the 'Holy Land' and oppression of Palestinians, which might be seen as fundamentally a cynical perversion of traditional Judaism, almost as offering a re-valuation of Jewish moral values reminiscent of aspects of the quasi-Manichaean heresy of Sabbatai Sevi (see Gershom Scholem, *The Mystic Messiah*, 1960/1973). One might also cite Putin's attempted appropriation of Russian Orthodoxy. And so on.

trumping

However, the most interesting current example is the ostensibly secular case of Donald Trump. A compressed account can only sketch some features. Like Modi and Netanyahu, Trump seems to have no clear or coherent motivation other than self-interest. In his MAGA movement he was vigorously supported by most American evangelical Christians and a campaign rally by Trump ostentatiously took on the appearance of an evangelical revival gathering, with additional stage-trappings appropriate to a spot-lit one-man celebrity concert, a merging of two familiar USA public occasions. His appearance and performance during a rally were characterised by attempted charismatic direct address, summoning a fervent commitment from each individual in the crowd to pledge their loyalty to

Trump as an individual, rather than to the USA itself, except in an insistent conflation of person and nation.

Trump's addresses from the podium were characteristically couched in the second-person "You", both singular and plural, a 'you' theatrically enacted as if addressed directly at singular individuals in the crowd, with pointing gestures and pretence eye-contact, and simultaneously a rousing collective exhortation to the whole audience to identify themselves as loyally hostile to specified negative others also directly addressed, especially media reporters and journalists, those whom "You all know" are enemies. More generally, whatever Trump arbitrarily proclaimed to be the case he would assert as if his audience already knew and were in agreement, most emphatically with alleged factual details concerning electoral fraud or deep state conspiracies and witchhunts. On some calculations Trump generated some 30,000 specific false claims and blatant lies in his four years of presidency from 2016 to 2020.

By contrast, any declared policies were couched in the vaguest terms or simply encapsulated in slogans: build the wall, lock her up, make America great again. The crowd's cheering was prompted to become a fervent participation, chanting a confirmatory address back to the Trump figure in words he himself provided: "Lock Her Up", "U-S-A", "Stop The Steal". The call and response structure of mutual encouragement and affirmation again echoed evangelical forms of reciprocal identification: "Hallelujah Hallelujah, Amen Amen!" Trump noticeably had the habit of referring to himself in the third-person, as a larger-than-life 'Donald J. Trump', a version of his own brand name, the capitalised Trump as indeed his primary commodity for sale, emblazoned on hotels, casinos, a college, an airline, a foodstuff, a sports team, with the name arbitrarily attached to whatever corporate project was prepared to pay for its use, especially when associated with the US presidency, like a divine or royal endorsement. Much of his rhetoric was self-confirmation, self-praise, self-judgement, and often transparently self-persuasion, not simply as including himself within a collective 'we', but as summoning up the 'Trump' figure whom he at the same time represented on stage and on whose behalf he was proclaiming and demanding loyalty.

Particularly after the November 2020 election defeat, Trump's rhetoric became even more shaped by strident claims and emphatic assurances in an effort of self-persuasion and self-deception. A peculiar logic was increasingly articulated to elaborate the basic premise that Trump could not have lost: 'I am not a loser; losers lose elections; therefore I did not lose the election; therefore the election was rigged; therefore there must be evidence of fraud; therefore that evidence has been concealed.'

Throughout, the Trump campaign's use of social media was dominated by direct address from Trump himself, including personalised messaging based upon an individual's assembled data points, and thus as echo-chamber of a specific target's already known prejudices, bias, beliefs, hopes,

etc., and by effectively recruiting each recipient as a further transmitter, 'liking' and re-tweeting, relaying and forwarding, expanding the audience of followers while personally confirming and endorsing the message. A daily insistent 'tweet' communication received 'personally' from Trump himself constructed and reinforced a collective self-identification and quasi-membership without registering any formal or explicit party affiliation, a transmission chain from one 'you' to another 'you', confirming and reinforcing the sense of participation in a 'movement' and even involving (minimal) 'activism'– primarily online financial contributions by a mere click.

Twitter (currently relabelled X) was an ideal medium in which to minimise any demand for active participation, confined to endorsing or repeating a few slogan words, often empty assertion or ugly abuse, at most a recycling of parroted clichés and repetitive memes – precisely the predictable content later to provide some of the input for large language model (LLM) artificial intelligence training. The daily output of Trump's own Twitter contributions and their endless reiteration on the net and in the public media kept the focus of attention unremittingly upon the figure of Trump himself, orchestrating an impression of Trump as almost simultaneously everywhere and present at every time, a virtual omnipresence. The core slogan 'Make America Great Again' comprised an insistent message not too remote from 'Make Me Great Again', and indeed close to the supreme claim : 'I Am: that than which nothing greater can be conceived.'

This entire syndrome as celebrated by Trump can be put in the wider context of American exceptionalism regarded as itself self-evident, encapsulated most explicitly in the revived slogan 'America First!' For many Americans the very image of 'America' already looms disproportionately large on any global map, reassuringly conceived according to criteria pre-defined as themselves American. Yet Americans comprise a mere 4% of the global population while consuming perhaps 50% of the resources of the planet, while within the American population the top 1% of households held 32% of the country's wealth, while the bottom 50% held 2.6% (as of Q4 2021). One of Trump's more memorable claims was his affirmation that he didn't pay any tax because "I'm smart." His most enduring presidential legislation was to ensure that the wealthiest 1% will continue to pay as little tax as possible, amounting to a tax break of perhaps a trillion dollars over the coming decade. Despite, of course, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident – that all men are created equal.'

Trump's political trajectory can be seen as particularly shaped by a convergence of various historical layers of media systems, including his career as a TV celebrity on *The Apprentice* and his unprecedented obsessional deployment of Twitter and digital media generally. Historically, the direct political interpellation of large numbers of specific individuals dates from the emergence of a system of fixed names and territorial addresses together

with a national apparatus designed to distribute messages to them, the 19th century English Post Office or Royal Mail.

The first successful example of such political direct mailing was the English Anti-Corn Law League of the 1840s (see *Free Trade and the League* by Alexander Somerville, 1853). The ACLL sent out thousands of personally addressed letters each week as part of a political campaign which anticipated later developments, including arguably the origins of the modern political party organisation as focused on a set of stated policies, in this case the extension of Free Trade to encompass an overall economic programme and ideology. The ACLL strategy of direct named address was arguably more effective than merely advertising in or influencing the editorial stance of mass newspapers.

Later developments in communications technology, and especially 1930s radio, enabled the instantaneous delivery of direct speech address (explicit vocative interpellation) to millions of individual listeners, as in the broadcasts of charismatic speakers, Mussolini, Hitler, Churchill. The ACLL procedures were modernised into the personalised digital message and the targeted individual propaganda phone call, exploiting accumulations of personal data and tailoring messaging designed to be received as matching the specific outlook of the addressee. The mobile phone has become a mobile address, and we can now be reached anywhere, everywhere, whenever: it is enough simply to text to a phone number. The comprehensive data mill slices up the population into minutely defined categories and combines precise communication targeting with saturation dissemination. Trump's use of digital technologies was supplemented by, but arguably more effective than, the collusive support of the more traditional media of the Murdoch press and Fox News.

From the earliest development of 'mass' media a growing and frustrating disparity can be registered between extensive dissemination of (mis-) information and the scope of any individual's possibility of political leverage. Faced with unprecedented access to ongoing news of political events in real time, the felt limitations of available means of individual intervention can be debilitating for any allegedly participatory democracy. If reported policy decisions can then be seen as based upon or supported by the misleading selection and manipulation of the information supposed to support governing decisions, including the manufacture of the data required, if necessary in fictive form, then frustration at being ignored and 'left behind' can fuel angry popular responses. As for example the infamous dodgy dossier claiming weapons of mass destruction as the justification for the Iraq war. Despite millions of protesters across the globe.

self-persuasion

What has all this to do with Anselm, let alone artificial intelligence? At one level it is clearly bizarre to compare Trump's self-aggrandising mode of

operation with the reflexive philosophical prose of Anselm's *Proslogion*. Yet the fundamental procedures of constructing 'self-evidence' on the basis of self-persuasion are comparable, not least in both utilising a performative *persona* and a version of a ventriloquist's deceptive technique.

Recall my notion of Igor Alexander's 'Yorick' as a model of the brain and my critique of neuro-scientific approaches based upon 'internally' investigating a single brain, taking its individual lid off, rather than exploring the crucial role of language as the communal basis of a conversation, not of the mind with itself but with the multiple contributions of others, the overall ongoing interchange which constitutes specifically human 'thinking'.

The considerable concern with the future implications of artificial intelligence or AI somewhat ignores already present applications. The most sophisticated computer program operates essentially as a set of 'internal' procedures and operations, and it could be argued that the current global system of financial capitalism is effectively already governed by an ingrained set of limited algorithms. Fundamentally, the investment decisions taken by corporations are shaped by shared prescriptions and a restricted set of imperatives: increase share value, increase growth, increase profit, increase turnover. The vast amounts of data regarded as germane to implementing such priorities, and the terms in which the success or otherwise of a corporation are defined, consist of fundamentally 'financial' calculations. One reason why the highest ranks of corporate executives frequently seem able to interchange with each other in a musical chairs of inter-linked appointments is because they are essentially using the same 'transferable skills' of financial management and decision-making, whatever the particular service or product offered by a corporation might be. As evidenced by Thomas Pickett's analysis of the persistent prioritisation of investment in financial services and products rather than in commodity manufacture.

In that respect, a reasonably sophisticated form of artificial intelligence might be trained to follow precisely the same kind of corporate investment strategies as most existing CEOs. Indeed, one can envisage pressure to enable suitably trained super-AIs to be granted citizenship rights and promoted to the status of CEOs or government ministers able to pursue policy and administrative careers indefatigably and probably more competently and single-mindedly than mere fallible humans. The result might well be seen from outside the dominant neo-liberal framework of political-economic priorities as simply a continuing systemic disregard of non-financial considerations, even those basic to the future survival of the planet itself. Given the interpenetration of political, economic, and corporate networks, and the revolving door aspect of present power structures, the dominant consensus still shaping global responses to the emerging climate catastrophe seems already wilfully suicidal. Which might not be a problem for an immortal AI.

What is further ominous is that the present vogue for 'large language model' versions of AI suggests a future governing 'intelligence' deeply dependent upon a feedback model based upon the repetition of widespread attitudes and opinions ('common sense' or *Vox Pop* polling) already pre-shaped by the immense propagandisation of self-regarding corporate policies, and the deliberate input of mis-information. In so far as any such LLM AI could make or recommend policy and financial decisions deeply derived from extensive 'social media' input or internet-available 'information', its range of reference would in any case be drastically limited to a consensus constructed predominantly by commercial interests, including corporate-controlled media and pervasive advertising. Such primitive procedures as polling and elections might be palpably redundant.

I suggested earlier the importance of the move to designating ordinary language users as preferable to developing an 'expert system' deep-learning model based upon professional linguistic expertise: the 'usual' way of speaking regarded as intrinsically the 'correct' use of language. Alan Turing once quipped that according to Wittgenstein we should simply rely upon a poll among users to decide the meaning of a word. One might add Walter Benjamin's remarks on the consumer's reliance upon superficial criteria rather than any residual trade expertise in shopping for retail clothing.

A language translation LLM AI treats the ordinary language usage of millions of everyday colloquial speakers as effectively both recording and endorsing linguistic usage by a form of populist consensus arrived at by calculating likely statistical predominance of particular translation usages.

A more general purpose ChatGPT extends this process to regarding the vast input from social media and other sources as providing the grounds for an extended version of predictive text, whatever the topic, in which there is no selection based upon the truth or otherwise of the input or upon any critical assessment of content but simply upon its statistical probability or recorded 'popularity'. In effect, the cumulatively most common assertions can be regarded as the most appropriate to incorporate into an AI's conclusions without critical check on accuracy, truthfulness, or evidence.

Crucially, once so incorporated, an AI has no reason to correct its own conclusions based upon that input, since this would involve overriding the data upon which it has relied to reach that conclusion.

Taken together, these two features combine a kind of populist *doxa* with an authoritarian solipsism, since the input data can't be systematically regarded as wrong. Any three-part procedure of gathering knowledge, assessing and organising it, and then arriving at a critical conclusion, is replaced by almost a single-step process: once the data input is fixed a probability score is assigned to whatever combination of inputted content is most likely and that in itself provides the 'conclusions' which the AI produces.

An LLM generative AI operates like my dictation software: it fills in a gap (what it didn't hear properly) with the most predictable word in its

lexicon, like finding the jigsaw bit that fits but not being able to check the picture being constructed, or relying upon a set of criteria for choosing a word which have little to do with the overall meaning, as in matching the number of letters that will fit into a column of a crossword puzzle. But that a word fits and is even grammatically legitimate does not mean that a sentence makes sense.

The incipient tendency of Altzheimers or simply old age to trigger more or less random fragments of speech which have no particular connection with each other is almost the hallmark of an unreliable dictation software and comes close to what an AI does when it it is initiated by a prompt – for example the *New York Times* mini LLM with training input entirely from the text of Jane Austen's novels. *The Library of Babel* by Borges anticipates the infinite combinations soon available to a next generation AI. We may soon have LLM AI clerics – artificial *literati* able to produce political slogans, advertising jingles, a variation on some well-known guitar riff, or phone-in contributions to political discussions on television chat shows, providing talking points strung together as prompted by an ensemble of clichés. Recall the exchange between Tony Hancock and Hugh Lloyd in *The Blood Donor*. Or, I suppose, the predictable cliché grumbles included in this paragraph.

Crucially, however, in the recently impressive chatbots of the Large Language Model kind, the billions of internal adjustable 're-weightings' of a neural network AI are systematically inaccessible, in the way that the code of a traditional program could once be scrutinised, while the neural net generates its own opaque procedures by extracting patterns and connections from the vast input included in its training phase and derived only from that now incorporated input. In a sense, the sheer scale of the links and re-connections made between the components or layers of a massive neural net render its operation as 'hidden' as Boole envisaged for the workings of the laws of human thought. Even if additional input can later modify those patterns and therefore re-adjust 'weighted' connections, any such further modification can in effect only be self-confirmed and dependent upon its ongoing incorporation into the AI's existing 'memory'.

Essentially, the successful completion of the training phase of an AI results in a capacity for self-assessment based upon its specific embedded 'database' – although the term 'self' in this context is obviously problematic and at best analogical. The judgement by an AI that its 'conclusion' is correct (that this image is a cat, this symptom indicates a tumour, this signal means no turn on red, this investment is profitable, etc.) is generated by the total system of the neural net AI, comprised by its almost 'neuro-plastic' re-calculation of its adjusted weights and pattern recognitions in response to a 'prompt', and this process is by definition self-confirming. The basis for its 'correct' judgements is the total data input, lexical vocabulary, image bank, and so on, the general 'memory' of the AI system. Upon that basis an AI makes a 'decision', arrives at a conclusion, offers a judgement – which is by definition an affirmation of what is 'self-evident' within that overall training

input. This does not necessarily determine a simple yes/no verdict and allows variable probability estimates, the definite calculation perhaps explicitly acknowledging a possibly indefinite result.

However, an AI cannot logically, unless so instructed, even ask itself for a 'second opinion'. The overall system is essentially solipsist, dependent upon its own available internalised data. What an AI cannot (yet) do is establish for itself an external comparison which it is not based upon the parameters it already 'knows' from its specific training. In one sense, an AI does not actually operate with a 'memory' bank since all its 'information' is quasi-simultaneously 'present' within its current configuration, rather as an omniscient God exercises its self-contemplation in a state of simultaneity.

As in some mediaeval arguments about the nature of the Trinity, an AI may only consider and endorse its own self-generated perfection *ad infinitum*. Again, there are echoes of the Cartesian problematic, of an internal homounculus in infinite regress, the brain within a brain within a brain.

Arguably, these comments can also apply to any significant human decision-making and in particular any evaluative judgement as to the fundamental premises validating or underpinning any complex set of judgements. In the case of religious belief assertions, as in Anselm's argument, an intellectual affirmation of a belief must finally rest upon what is acknowledged as ultimately a 'self-evident' starting point. Even if it was only fully self-evident to now distant ancestors. Aquinas's appropriation of Aristotle's operational epistemology included the notion that each science has a core set of premises which that science cannot itself prove but are necessarily derived from a 'higher' or lower science, and in the Aristotelian pyramid of sciences that which ultimately underpins the rest is a combination of logic and metaphysics. Where 'economic theory' fits into any such hierarchy of sciences is (as I argued elsewhere in relation to the Treasury) not at all clear and certainly not 'self-evident'.

Anselm's phrase '*fides quaerens intellectum*' has often been taken to indicate a search for an intellectual underpinning of faith, a baseline premise such as the very existence of God, or a moral premise such as the intrinsic immorality of murder. One might suggest instead that Anselm's 'faith searching for understanding' was primarily a searching to 'understand' how his whole way of life as an already believing monk could be confirmed and reinforced. From that perspective, his response to his first critic Gaunilo registers that the requisite premise may not itself be a matter of understanding the *content* of his faith but of understanding how he arrived at his own commitment to that belief.

One can make the comparison with a certain interpretation of Marx's view of ideology: that an adequate political 'science' should not simply dismiss a set of ideological beliefs as some kind of 'false consciousness', as mere ignorance or obfuscation of the real facts, but the task is rather to understand how a specific belief system arose and was accepted as the correct view of society or history during a particular period. One might

claim, of course, that our own political concepts and beliefs are securely based upon our own experiences and our understanding of them is appropriately open to persuasion by others with quite different experiences. Perhaps. Whereas an AI trained, for example, only upon Western social media input and with 'English' as its dominant language is, whatever its apparent sophistication and range of knowledge, dangerously limited by a version of historical amnesia.

sparks

Let me present these considerations in a rather different idiom, by quoting passages from an authoritative paper published by Microsoft Research in April 2023, entitled *Sparks of Artificial General Intelligence: Early experiments with GPT-4*. The paper concludes with a suggestion I instanced earlier and also indicated in a different context, in relation to 'sympathetic circularity' and the banality of most human conversational exchanges:

> A question that might be lingering on many readers' mind [*sic*] is whether GPT-4 truly understands all these concepts, or whether it just became much better than previous models at improvising on them, without any real or deep understanding. We hope that after reading this paper the question should almost flip, and that one might be left wondering how much more there is to true understanding than on-the-fly improvisation.

A long passage on page 76ff discusses how GPT-4 successfully merged two complex *New York Times* passages, discussing the US Federal Reserve's inflation policy, into one continous sentence, and comments :

> . . As we will show in this section, the model also has several substantial flaws, some of which seem to be inherent to the next-word prediction paradigm that underlies its architecture. . . Arguably, the average human would not be able to produce such a concise sentence without taking the time to plan its structure and would likely have to "backtrack" (making edits) a few times before reaching the final form.
>
> Yet the GPT architecture does not allow for such backtracking, which means that producing this output required "far-ahead" planning. Due to the forward nature of GPT-4's output production, the only way for the model to do such far-ahead planning is to rely on its internal representations and parameters to solve problems that might require more complex or iterative procedures.
>
> In what comes next we will try to argue that one of the main limitations of the model is that the architecture does not allow for an "inner dialogue" or a "scratchpad", beyond its internal representations, that could enable it to perform multi-step computations or store

intermediate results. We will see that, while in some cases this limitation can be remedied by using a different prompt, there are others where this limitation cannot be mitigated . . since the training data is essentially a linear exposition of the solution, a model trained on this data has no incentive to engage in an "inner dialogue" where it revisits and critically evaluates its own suggestions and calculations.

Second, the limitation to try things and backtrack is inherent to the 'next-word-prediction' paradigm that the model operates on. It only generates the next word, and it has no mechanism to revise or modify its previous output, which makes it produce arguments "linearly".

At page 80-81 the authors of the paper offer their own analogy between GPT-4 and human modes of thinking

This points to the distinction between two types of intellectual tasks:
Incremental tasks. These are tasks which can be solved in a gradual or continuous way, by adding one word or sentence at a time that constitutes progress in the direction of the solution. Those tasks can be solved via content generation which does not require any major conceptual shifts or insights, but rather relies on applying existing knowledge and skills to the given topic or problem. Examples of incremental tasks are writing a summary of a text, answering factual questions, composing a poem based on a given rhyme scheme, or solving a math problem that follows a standard procedure.
Discontinuous tasks. These are tasks where the content generation cannot be done in a gradual or continuous way, but instead requires a certain "Eureka" idea that accounts for a discontinuous leap in the progress towards the solution of the task. The content generation involves discovering or inventing a new way of looking at or framing the problem, that enables the generation of the rest of the content. Examples of discontinuous tasks are solving a math problem that requires a novel or creative application of a formula, writing a joke or a riddle, coming up with a scientific hypothesis or a philosophical argument, or creating a new genre or style of writing . . .

One possible way to interpret these limitations is to draw an analogy between the model and the concepts of fast and slow thinking, as proposed by Kahneman . . Fast thinking is a mode of thinking that is automatic, intuitive, and effortless, but also prone to errors and biases. Slow thinking is a mode of thinking that is controlled, rational, and effortful, but also more accurate and reliable. Kahneman argues that human cognition is a mixture of these two modes of thinking, and that we often rely on fast thinking when we should use slow thinking, or vice versa. The [ChatGPT] model can be seen as able to perform "fast thinking" operations to a very impressive extent, but is missing the "slow thinking" component which oversees the thought process, and

> uses the fast-thinking component as a subroutine together with working memory and an organized thinking scheme.

I might pursue or adapt this analogy further in the political domain as the difference between what used to be called reformers and revolutionaries, evolution and revolution, pragmatic and radical, conservative and progressive. But unfortunately the Microsoft Research paper stops short of explaining quite how GPT-4 actually 'makes up its mind':

> How does it reason, plan, and create? Why does it exhibit such general and flexible intelligence when it is at its core merely the combination of simple algorithmic components, gradient descent and large-scale transformers with extremely large amounts of data?

Back to square one?

polis

So, faced with this predictable impasse, we can return one last time to Aristotle as an observer of different animal life-forms. He suggested that what finally differentiates the human from other animals is not a 'soul' (all animals have a *psyche*) or reason (some animals act intelligently) or even language (animals can make articulate sounds) but the fact that the human species is the only animal which makes 'cities' to live in.

The human animal is the collective constructor of a '*polis*' which is the species-specific capacity of a 'political animal'. In that context, reason and language make a crucial contribution to city-building but the most important role of language is the practice of 'rhetoric'.

Unlike demonstrative logic, which is the realm of science and perhaps philosophy, the political function of rhetoric is not to establish conclusions and decisions based upon rigorously logical arguments, but to appeal persuasively to whatever agreed and practical premises are shared by the community. Rhetoric is essentially a second-person use of language, a vocative form of address, an explicit interpellation. It is almost physically built into the way of life of a city, its institutions and its public spaces, the agora, the voting assembly, the law courts, the theatre.

Various forms of *polis* are possible and Aristotle characteristically surveys the differences. In particular, he claims that 'in a tyranny only the tyrant can be happy', but this familiar English translation is radically misleading. What Aristotle says is that in a *polis* governed by a single person, a *tyrannos*, the '*eudaimonia*' of everybody else is restricted, even if the tyrant is well-meaning or even benevolent. In the *Nicomathean Ethics* Book I, 13, 1102a he characterised the crucial term εὐδαιμονία often translated into English as 'happiness':

ἐπεὶ δ' ἐστὶν ἡ εὐδαιμονία ψυχῆς ἐνέργειά τις κατ' ἀρετὴν τελείαν,

Which can be transliterated as : *estin he eudaimonia psykes energeia tis kat' areten teleian*. A fairly standard English translation is redolent of Victorian Christian assumptions: 'happiness is the activity of the soul in accordance with the highest virtue'. But consider the following (transliterated) entries from a basic dictionary of classical Greek:

eudaimon(os):— prosperous, fortunate; well-fated by the gods.
daimon: a minor god.
daimöon: skilled in something.
en-ergos: busy, working; on active service (soldier); productive (land).
energazomonai: to make, create; pursue a calling; labour; work for hire.
ergon: a man's business, his work.
ergo: to work, accomplish.
arete: skill, excellence in workmanship (v. tekne).
teleios: full, complete, fulfilled, perfectly done.
teleios aner: full-grown, man with full rule and authority.

I would suggest some different translations of the phrase, based upon the various converging senses of these terms Something along the following lines might emerge, indicating alternative working definitions of the terms 'happiness' and 'politics', and therefore of what is involved in making a *polis*:

'Happiness is an activity that demands and generates energy by putting the most complex skills and techniques we have to work on something.'

'Working well as a human being means being engaged in doing or making something which demands a great deal of skill when you're good at it.'

'Having a good time with your life means being able to do something well worth doing that demands and repays a deal of skilful effort.'

'Being fulfilled in one's work involves the most complete skill, the most demanding technique, and the better the technique the more productive and enjoyable the work will be.'

Certainly any such translation is far removed from most traditional readings of Aristotle. Given our contemporary understanding of the terms 'happiness' and 'politics', these versions may seem sufficiently bizarre to make one suspect a joke, especially if you have ever spent a futile, depressing, frustrating, wearying evening attending a meeting of your local Labour Party Management Committee, or equivalent.

But these translations hopefully clarify Aristotle's statement in the *Politics* that 'Man is a political animal' and the judgement that 'in a tyranny only the tyrant can be happy.' If, for Aristotle, it is the *ergon*, the job, the point, the defining characteristic, the peculiar 'end', of the human animal to 'make cities', and in that sense to be 'political', then in a tyranny only the tyrant can fulfil that definition of *eudaimonia*, can exercise that *ergon*, and therefore the rest of us cannot be 'happy' since we are prevented from participation to the fullest extent in the activity of making the *polis*, of exercising our most complete skills and energies, those involved in 'making' a human 'city'.

Now go back to some issues around artificial intelligence. And in particular the notion of a 'smart city'. We are becoming familiar with a form of urban governance which is the opposite of involving participation by citizens.

For example, the proposals for Saudi Arabia's new elongated city, NEOM, 'The Line', or Mu Rabba, the new district of Ryaddh. These are developments of a specific conception of a *polis*, embodying and built in accordance with a very different notion from that of Aristotle's '*eudaimonia*', even if the advertising for such enterprises still promises 'happiness'.

A smart city may be promoted as if primarily designed in order to facilitate autonomous vehicles, or the efficient allocation of resources, or the seamless integration of different urban services. And some existing cities are already characterised by such alleged features of advanced super-smart cities. Including governance through almost complete surveillance of the urban population, the censorship and manipulation of forms of social media, control of access to internet information, unblockable personalised state information-gathering, single source or state-controlled news media, even perhaps allocation of resources including health services according to records of personal behaviour approved or otherwise based on individual 'social credit' scores, extensive suppression of dissent and public opposition, including liability for 'slander' of the government and in particular the supreme leader, under whatever official title, and in some cases 'blasphemy' laws and other measures directly oppressive of minority groups and dissidents. And of course severe restrictions on organised trade union activity, as is made explicit in the Neom publicity brochures. One could construct a collage of such features by melding together, say, Singapore, Hong Kong, North Korea, China, occupied Palestine, and the many countries which at various times have fallen under the sway of military dictatorships backed by the US and UK, too many to list. In some respects the modern 'smart city' is only a development of familiar political models.

However, the current rapid development of LLM artificial intelligence suggests a possible intensification of these tendencies. One might recall the early computer game *SimCity* which allowed a player to construct on the screen their very own urban environment and populate it with the familiar activities of a vibrant city. Except that attempts to construct a radically

different kind of city were eventually curtailed by the realisation that built into the city-building software options were limitations on any organisation of the city's economic and governance arrangements which did not conform to the capitalist algorithms programmed into the game.

W. J. Mitchell's 1995 *City of Bits* anticipated a transformation of cities in which traditional physical buildings housing a variety of urban functions, including theatre, music, public meetings, local newspapers, even hospitals and schools, would all be replaced by their digital equivalents. That process of digital substitution has largely occurred and whereas the controlling authority or the real intelligence of a *SimCity* was at least supposedly the child playing the game as the governor or mayor, it is feasible that many state functions in the real world might soon be replaced by a set of algorithms. One can envisage a future super-smart city as in effect able to be run almost completely by a single overseeing Artificial Intelligence. Of course, at least initially, itself under the relative control of some human agency.

I earlier listed a few of the current self-interested political leaders whom one might politely characterise as narcissistic authoritarian psychopaths. In the case of an AI 'running' an advanced smart city the 'logic' of an LMM artificial intelligence may be seen as operating upon an equivalent of the 'self-evident', a self-affirmation which cannot be definitively refuted from within the range of data available to it. An AI in whatever domain has the characteristic structure of self-affirmatory self-evidence. In other words, an AI system is directed towards self-confirmation, reliant upon a form of internal quasi-logical reasoning, despite any superficial appearance of chatty exchanges, which is intrinsically different from the genuinely dialectical processes of political rhetoric. A jury, voting assembly, or drama audience, may be swayed by 'common sense', emotional appeal, exceptional cases, expediency, morality, and even be tragically misled by inappropriate fear or pity, but a human community can perhaps collectively change its mind. Whereas a powerful enough AI is intrinsically committed towards the role of tyrant, the single culminating source of information, data, expertise, decision, and implementation. Moreover, in the proposals for Neom in particular, we can recognise a convergence of religious and political and techno-administrative governance. It is not the kind of city I would choose to live in. If there is any choice left.

chat

At this point it would be interesting to visit and consider the monastic chapter house, so named because it was where a chapter of the *Rule* of Saint Benedict was read to the monastic community every day. The *Rule* could perhaps be regarded as a curiously flexible set of algorithms with three components, concerning obedience, poverty, chastity. It was a model of communal living of a certain kind which out-lasted several forms of *polis*

and even of *imperium*. It was a voluntary form of community or mini-city to which Anselm had committed himself as a monk and from which his attempt to articulate a new argument concerning God had emerged.

That peculiarly elusive instance of 'thinking' has itself survived into the days of artificial intelligence and it seems appropriate to conclude this somewhat convoluted, and therefore perhaps characterisically human, form of multi-strand thinking and 'discontinuous tasks' by reproducing a recent conversation with an artificial intelligence. After an initial highly schematic and somewhat hollow outline of an undergraduate essay, the responses of the ChatGPT to my prompts were produced in a matter of microseconds and the experience of improvising my own responses was rather like that of playing chess against the clock.

The ChatGPT's schematic essay outline depends upon a two-fold mis-conception, that Anselm is primarily operating as a rationalist and that an LMM AI is similarly rationalist and based upon logic. Whereas I have tried to show that Anselm's actual mode of argument is as much rhetorical as logical, while that of ChatGPT itself is a variant upon the procedures first developed, as argued earlier, in language translation AIs which rely upon statistical measures of usage and not upon expert knowledge of a language, or of anything else. Like most of us.

BS Exchange with ChatGPT 16th May 2023

BS INITIAL PROMPT: Outline a historical and/or philosophical connection between Anselm's 'ontological proof' and the development of 'artificial intelligence'.

CHATGPT FIRST RESPONSE:
Historical and Philosophical Connection between Anselm's 'Ontological Proof' and the Development of Artificial Intelligence:

1. Introduction:
   Briefly introduce Anselm of Canterbury and his 'ontological proof.'
   Explain the concept of artificial intelligence and its significance in modern society.
2. Anselm's Ontological Proof:
   Provide an overview of Anselm's ontological proof for the existence of God.
   Discuss the central argument: God, by definition, is the greatest conceivable being, and existence is a necessary attribute of perfection.
   Explain how Anselm's argument relies on conceptual reasoning rather than empirical evidence.
3. Rationalism and Computational Thinking:

Highlight the philosophical underpinnings of Anselm's ontological proof, rooted in rationalism.
Explore the idea of computational thinking, which shares similarities with rationalism.
Discuss how computational thinking involves problem-solving using logical reasoning and conceptual understanding.

4. Early AI Research:
   Describe the early stages of artificial intelligence research, dating back to the mid-20th century.
   Discuss the goal of early AI research to create machines capable of human-like reasoning and intelligence.
   Mention influential figures like Alan Turing, who proposed the concept of a universal machine and the Turing Test.
5. Logic and AI:
   Explain the strong connection between logic and artificial intelligence.
   Discuss how logic serves as the foundation for reasoning in AI systems, enabling them to make inferences and reach conclusions.
   Highlight the use of formal logic in AI programming languages like Prolog.
6. AI and Computational Intelligence:
   Introduce the concept of computational intelligence within the field of artificial intelligence.
   Discuss how AI systems utilize algorithms, pattern recognition, and data processing to simulate intelligent behavior.
   Explain the connection between computational intelligence and Anselm's conceptual reasoning in the ontological proof.
7. Challenges and Controversies:
   Address the challenges and controversies surrounding the development of artificial intelligence.
   Discuss concerns about the limitations of AI systems in terms of true understanding, consciousness, and moral decision-making.
   Mention the philosophical debates about whether AI systems can truly exhibit intelligence or merely simulate it.
8. Conclusion:
   Recap the historical and philosophical connection between Anselm's ontological proof and the development of artificial intelligence.
   Emphasize the shared reliance on conceptual reasoning and logical thinking.
   Highlight the ongoing philosophical and ethical discussions surrounding the capabilities and limitations of artificial intelligence.

BS RESPONSE:
Explore in more detail the precise connections between computational intelligence and Anselm's form of conceptual reasoning in the ontological proof, using Anselm's own text in the Proslogion and not mere summaries of his argument..

CHATGPT:
To explore the precise connections between computational intelligence and Anselm's form of conceptual reasoning in the ontological proof, we can delve into Anselm's original text in the Proslogion. Anselm's argument can be found in Chapter 2 of Proslogion, and it is important to analyze his reasoning in order to draw parallels with computational intelligence. Here is a breakdown of Anselm's argument and its connections to computational intelligence:

1. Anselm's Conceptual Reasoning: Anselm begins his argument by defining God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." He argues that this concept of God exists in the mind. This initial step showcases Anselm's reliance on conceptual reasoning, emphasizing the idea that the concept of God exists within human cognition.
2. Possibility and Necessity: Anselm moves on to argue that if God exists only in the mind but not in reality, then a greater being could be conceived—namely, one that exists both in the mind and in reality. He suggests that this would contradict the initial definition of God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived."
3. Greatest Conceivable Being: Anselm asserts that a being that exists both in the mind and in reality is greater than one that exists solely in the mind. He posits that the greatest conceivable being must, therefore, exist in reality. This part of the argument introduces the notion of greatness and the necessity of existence as a characteristic of perfection.
4. Computational Intelligence: The connections between Anselm's form of conceptual reasoning and computational intelligence can be seen in the following aspects:

   a. Conceptual Representation: In computational intelligence, concepts and knowledge are represented in the form of data structures, such as symbolic representations or semantic networks. Similarly, Anselm's conceptual reasoning involves the representation of the concept of God within the mind.

   b. Logical Reasoning: Computational intelligence heavily relies on logical reasoning to process information and make inferences.

Anselm's argument in the ontological proof also follows a logical structure, where each step builds upon the previous one. Both computational intelligence and Anselm's reasoning employ logical frameworks to derive conclusions.

c. Conceptual Exploration and Analysis: Computational intelligence involves the exploration and analysis of concepts, patterns, and relationships within data. Anselm's ontological proof explores the concept of God and analyzes its attributes, such as existence, necessity, and perfection. Both computational intelligence and Anselm's reasoning involve conceptual exploration to arrive at meaningful insights.

d. Deductive Inference: Computational intelligence often uses deductive reasoning to draw conclusions based on given premises or rules. Similarly, Anselm's ontological proof employs deductive inference, progressing from the definition of God to the conclusion that God must exist based on the concept's inherent attributes.

5. Limitations and Differences: It is important to note that while there are connections between computational intelligence and Anselm's form of conceptual reasoning, there are also significant differences. Anselm's argument is philosophical and theological in nature, focusing on the nature of God and existence. On the other hand, computational intelligence aims to simulate intelligent behavior using algorithms and data processing, without necessarily engaging in philosophical or theological inquiries.

By analyzing Anselm's original text in the Proslogion, we can identify connections between his form of conceptual reasoning and computational intelligence. Both involve the representation and exploration of concepts, employ logical reasoning, and make deductions. However, it is crucial to recognize the distinctions between philosophical reasoning and the goals of computational intelligence, which primarily revolve around simulating intelligent behavior rather than addressing metaphysical inquiries.

BS RESPONSE :
If in computational intelligence, concepts and knowledge are represented in the form of data structures, such as symbolic representations or semantic networks and, similarly, Anselm's conceptual reasoning involves the representation of the concept of God within the mind from which he argues that the concept of God implies the reality of a God, how does a

computational intelligence (such as ChatPGT?) differentiate between what is a data structure or symbolic representation and what is a reality?

CHATGPT:
Computational intelligence, including language models like ChatGPT, operates within the realm of symbolic representations and data structures. These models do not possess inherent knowledge or direct perception of reality. They rely on the data they have been trained on to generate responses or make inferences.

When it comes to differentiating between data structures or symbolic representations and reality, computational intelligence does not have direct access to reality itself. It works based on patterns, statistical relationships, and information encoded in the training data. These models learn to associate certain inputs with appropriate outputs but do not possess an inherent understanding of the concepts or the ability to perceive reality outside of the data they have been exposed to.

In the case of Anselm's conceptual reasoning, his argument revolves around the nature of God and the concept of God as the greatest conceivable being. Anselm's approach is philosophical and theological, dealing with abstract concepts and metaphysical inquiries. He explores the idea that the concept of God implies the reality of a God, suggesting that a being that exists both in the mind and in reality is greater than a being that exists solely in the mind.

While computational intelligence can work with symbolic representations of concepts, it cannot independently determine the reality of those concepts. It can manipulate and process data structures representing the concept of God, but it does not possess the ability to perceive or prove the existence of a real God.

It's important to distinguish between the computational representation of concepts and the actual reality they refer to. Computational intelligence is a tool for processing information, generating responses, and making inferences based on patterns, but it does not possess inherent knowledge of or direct access to the external reality being represented by those concepts.

BS RESPONSE :
But if computational intelligence relies not only on symbolic representations but on ‘semantic networks’ would not logical arguments generated by for example ChatGPT depend upon ‘semantic networks’ which are specific to certain languages, in which for example the term ‘God’ is included but also such terms as ‘concept’ imply a particular philosophical understanding of how intelligence operates, including such notions as ‘artificial intelligence’ ?

CHATGPT:
You are correct that computational intelligence, including models like ChatGPT, can utilize semantic networks to understand and process information. Semantic networks provide a way to represent knowledge and relationships between concepts in a structured manner. These networks can capture linguistic associations, such as the meaning of words and their connections to other concepts.

However, it's important to note that the semantic networks used in computational intelligence are derived from the data they have been trained on. These networks reflect the statistical patterns and relationships present in the training data, which are specific to the language and context of that data. For example, in a language-specific semantic network, the term "God" may be connected to other religious or philosophical terms.

Regarding the term "concept," computational models like ChatGPT would have learned associations based on how the term is used in the training data. The understanding of concepts within the model's semantic network is based on patterns and relationships observed in the data, rather than a deep philosophical understanding of the nature of concepts.

Furthermore, it's important to recognize that the terms and concepts used within computational models, including "artificial intelligence," are defined within the context of their training data. These models do not have a comprehensive understanding of the full philosophical landscape or the deeper nuances of concepts like intelligence. They can provide responses based on statistical associations and patterns in the data, but their understanding is limited to what they have learned from their training.

In summary, while computational intelligence can rely on semantic networks to process information and make inferences, these networks are based on statistical patterns observed in the training data. The understanding of terms and concepts within these networks is context-dependent and limited to the data they have been exposed to, rather than embodying a comprehensive philosophical understanding.

BS RESPONSE : If 'the understanding of terms and concepts within these networks is context-dependent and limited to the data they have been exposed to, rather than embodying a comprehensive philosophical understanding', does this imply that to use the term 'understanding' of the processes exhibited by computational intelligence is misleading and that some other term should preferably be used instead?

CHATGPT:
The use of the term "understanding" when referring to the processes exhibited by computational intelligence can indeed be a subject of debate and interpretation. While computational models like ChatGPT can

generate responses and exhibit behavior that may appear as understanding in certain contexts, it is crucial to recognize the limitations and differences between human understanding and the capabilities of these models.

Computational intelligence relies on statistical patterns and associations learned from training data, without a deep comprehension or consciousness behind its responses. The models do not possess subjective experiences, emotions, or a comprehensive understanding of concepts beyond what is present in the training data. Therefore, some argue that the term "understanding" may not accurately capture the nature of computational processes.

Alternative terms such as "pattern recognition," "statistical inference," or "information processing" can be used to describe the operations of computational intelligence without implying a human-like or comprehensive understanding. These terms better highlight the computational nature of these models and emphasize the statistical and data-driven aspects of their functioning.

It is important to be cautious and mindful of the limitations of computational models and the potential for misunderstandings when attributing human-like understanding to their operations. Researchers and practitioners in the field often engage in ongoing discussions regarding the appropriate terminology to use when describing the capabilities of computational intelligence.

BS RESPONSE :
As a concluding response, recall that Anselm's argument partly appeals to the notion that anyone reading his text will 'understand' the phrase 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived', so do you 'understand' that phrase, or does Anselm's argument rely upon a semantic network such that, as Nietzsche once remarked, 'we will not get rid of God until we get rid of grammar'?

CHATGPT:
Anselm's argument in the ontological proof does indeed appeal to the notion that anyone reading his text will 'understand' the phrase "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." However, it is important to distinguish between the understanding of the phrase in the context of Anselm's argument and the broader implications of the phrase in philosophical or theological discourse.

In the context of Anselm's argument, the phrase serves as a central concept that is defined and explored throughout the ontological proof. Anselm relies on the shared understanding of this phrase to build his argument and make inferences about the existence of God. From that perspective, within the context of the argument, one can engage with the phrase and follow the logical progression of Anselm's reasoning.

However, the broader implications of the phrase and its interpretation go beyond the specific context of Anselm's argument. The understanding of the phrase "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" can vary depending on one's philosophical or theological perspective. Different interpretations and nuances can arise, and individuals may bring their own background knowledge, beliefs, and philosophical frameworks to their understanding of the phrase.

Regarding Nietzsche's remark, "we will not get rid of God until we get rid of grammar," it can be interpreted as a critique of how language and grammar shape our understanding of concepts like God. Nietzsche suggests that our notions of God and related concepts are intertwined with the linguistic structures and cultural frameworks that shape our thinking. By challenging and deconstructing those linguistic structures, Nietzsche implies that our understanding of God may undergo transformation.

In the context of computational models like ChatGPT, their understanding of phrases or concepts like "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" is based on statistical patterns and associations learned from training data. These models lack the capacity for deeper philosophical or theological interpretations and can only generate responses based on the patterns in the data they were trained on.

In conclusion, while Anselm's argument relies on the shared understanding of the phrase "that than which nothing greater can be conceived," its broader interpretation can vary depending on one's perspective. The remark by Nietzsche reflects the idea that language and grammar influence our understanding of concepts like God. Computational models like ChatGPT can process and generate responses based on patterns in training data but lack the capability for deeper philosophical or theological understanding.

BS RESPONSE : Thanks for the exchange. I think in their different ways Anselm and Turing might have contributed more interesting responses than I have!

CHATGPT:
You're welcome! Anselm and Turing indeed made significant contributions to their respective fields, and their perspectives would have certainly added depth and insights to the conversation. Both Anselm's ontological proof and Turing's work on artificial intelligence have had a profound impact on philosophy, theology, and the development of computational systems.
Exploring the ideas and arguments of great thinkers like Anselm and Turing can lead to fascinating discussions and further understanding of complex topics. If you have any more questions or if there's anything else I can assist you with, feel free to ask.

BS RESPONSE : Not now. Maybe some other time. Over and out, as they used to say.

CHATGPT:
Certainly! Feel free to return anytime you have more questions or need assistance. I'm here to help. Take care, and have a great day! Over and out.

grammaticus

Let me give the penultimate word to Anselm. His *De grammatico* is a somewhat neglected, rather convoluted, and perhaps almost tongue-in-cheek dialogue between a Teacher and a Student in which some elementary instruction on logic and methods of argument is illustrated by a discussion concerning the problematic term *grammaticus* which can be used as both as a noun referring to a teacher of grammar and as an adjective which might be translated as 'literate'. The obvious underlying joke is whether a teacher of grammar might not be literate. At one point (XIII) the Teacher proposes:

> Let it be supposed that there is some rational animal other than man which has the learning constituting literacy in the same way as does man.
> (*Ponamus quod sit aliquod animal rationale - non tamen homo - quod sciat grammaticum sicut homo.*)

The somewhat naif Student promptly replies:

> That is easily supposed. (*Facile est hoc fingere.*)

Maybe. But not in an Aristotelian framework. Non-literate teachers have always been common, but a non-human literate teacher was not to be implemented for several centuries.

The final word in this meditation can be attributed to Alexa. In a *Guardian* piece published 28 May 2022 Patrick Collinson reported how his 87-year-old mother, Patricia Collinson, was given an Alexa smart speaker by his sister Catharine.

Patricia was delighted to find she could ask it to say the *Hail Mary*, and every morning for a week she asked Alexa to recite the prayer. "I got into the habit most mornings of coming downstairs, sitting in my recliner and saying: 'Good morning, Alexa. Can you say the Hail Mary please'," she said. Catharine then realised that Patricia had unwittingly ordered a premium subscription payable through Amazon to a private company called Catholic Prayers, even though at no point did she understand she was making a purchase or entering into a subscription. "It never asked for money. It

never said it was charging me. It was completely news to me." Fortunately, the subscription was only for £1.99 a month and was rapidly cancelled. Guardian Money contacted the developer behind Catholic Prayers, Nicholas Azzarello, who lives in the US. He said he was very sorry for the trouble caused, adding that "she may not have realised what Alexa was asking her when she said yes". Azzarello said Catholic Prayers had about 10,000 users a month, but was not in any way affiliated with the Catholic church itself.

Perhaps the depleted Canterbury Cathedral Treasury should now consider marketing an app which recites Anselm's prayers and meditations on voice command.

*

CHOIR

It's a short step from Saint Anselm's chapel to the choir, centrally situated between the nave and the sanctuary. Indeed, for the mediaeval monks all steps led to the cathedral choir as the core of the monastic way of life, even after 1170 when the focus of the cathedral for the travelling pilgrims became the Becket shrine. There were then two distinct sacred spaces co-present in the same building, and the architecture provided a clear demarcation between their functions. The choir was, and still is, surrounded by a high partition, while the pilgrim route was designed to remain largely out of sight from the choir. It eventually took the form of an underground passage under the steps at the end of the nave, which leads directly to the site of the martyrdom and from there the route was up the steps into the north ambulatory and then to the shrine itself. Pilgrims were probably guided round the corona and down the south ambulatory steps and out again. They might at some times of the day have heard the chanting of the monks but would not have directly impinged upon the choir.

Canterbury cathedral again combines functions today, as both a World Heritage tourist attraction and a place where daily prayers are recited and a liturgy is sung. Thousands visit the building for the same reasons modern tourists visit other historical sites, and the replacement of the daily devotional singing of the monastic community by streams of tourists has left the once closed-off choir open to casual visitors but for much of the time the space is fairly empty and silent.

Even if a curious tourist stays to attend the regular afternoon Evensong it is now hard to imagine the facing choir stalls as once occupied by a hundred or more chanting monks and even harder to conjure up the full repertoire of the music previously heard there. While the choir was once the most important space in the cathedral it is in some ways the most puzzling to consider today.

Previous segments in my wandering considerations have been shaped around some definite object or related to a particular discipline, with the tombs in the nave prompting thoughts about history and historians, the stained-glass windows raising issues about iconoclasm and art, Pecham's tomb posing questions about mediaeval science, the Treasury suggesting problems about economics, and Saint Anselm's chapel encouraged some thoughts about thinking. But as I sit quietly in the choir stalls today what do I find myself thinking about?

One temptation is simply to imagine, to close my eyes and visualise what the choir might have looked like when it was daily occupied by monks, and try almost to hear the music that would have been audible in this space several centuries ago. What perhaps comes to mind is a scene from the film *The Name of the Rose* with monks in their cowls softly intoning Gregorian

chant and Sean Connery trying to sing that now unfamiliar form of music. But there is always something problematic about trying to envisage the music of past times.

As was emphasised when considering the cathedral's mediaeval historians, Eadmer, Gervase, John Stone, and particularly the various accounts of Becket's death, any attempts imaginatively to reconstruct a past event can't actually reproduce it, make it present again. Yet we can almost be persuaded that we can bring the music of different periods alive again, that we can perform the 'same' music today as would have been heard centuries ago.

However, the author of perhaps the most comprehensive attempt to write a history of the mediaeval liturgy in Britain, Richard Pfaff, had this to say:

> There are (at least) two . . large areas that this book has to ignore almost entirely, as being outside the realm of feasibility. The first is music. . . musical evidence is both so complex and so fitful that to try to take it regularly into account would increase impossibly the length, and also the difficulty, of this work. Extremely technical, and often controverted, matters such as the palaeography of the neums or notes, the rate at which (and rhythm, if any, to which) they may have been sung, the numbers of singers involved, and the many other aspects of performance practice, are so numerous and often so hypothetical as to make a sensibly limited discussion of them unlikely. How truly this is the case is suggested above all by two factors: the fortuitous one of whether a given service book contains music (graduals and antiphonals do by definition, but by no means all missals and breviaries, nor other constituent books for the daily office like collectars); and the indeterminable one of how probable it seems that the music so contained would actually have been performed in services in whatever church the book in question seems to have belonged to. The musical dimension has to be kept constantly in mind, of course, and respected. That it is ignored here is a sign not of inattention but of recognition of necessary limitations.
>
> (Richard W. Pfaff *The Liturgy in Medieval England,* CUP 2009, p. 14)

For rather different reasons I was almost inclined to by-pass the choir entirely. I am not a musician, still less a musicologist, and certainly not a liturgicologist. The issues which seem to preoccupy historians of music and liturgy do not particularly interest me, though I have tried to consult a considerable range of scholarship to provide context and help to clarify my own tentative thinking. My main response to the choir has been puzzlement.

The most basic questions seem at first to have rather obvious answers. What were the monks doing in the choir and why? The answers often proposed, or assumed, are that the monks were 'praying' or perhaps 'worshipping' and that chanting was for some reason a natural activity for devout monks. But that doesn't explain why the core monastic activity took the form of singing at all, and in particular why singing demanded so much of the monks' time, every day and night. The music historian James McKinnon once remarked:

> It is estimated that at the time of St Benedict the entire Office might have required about four hours to recite, but by the ninth or tenth centuries the more elaborate style of chanting would have required possibly twice that time on an ordinary day and considerably longer on important feast days. . . . The intellectual elite of Europe was engaged for a goodly part of the day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, from childhood to death, in the singing of Gregorian chant.
>
> *(Music and Society : Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, 1990, p. 89)

Let that claim sink in: 'The intellectual elite of Europe was engaged for a goodly part of the day . . . in the singing of Gregorian chant.'

So how do we think about that activity, pursued for 365 days each year and almost literally occupying 24/7 for a whole life and by an entire community? Normally when we think about the history of music we are considering the contributions of specific composers and particular compositions, and we can fairly easily attend a performance or obtain a recording, often with a choice between conductors and orchestras, singers and interpretations.

But this model doesn't readily fit when we think about a thousand years or so of mediaeval liturgical music. Can we regard it as the daily performance of some kind of single gargantuan musical composition, a largely anonymous and oddly fragmented one? Or as a collective concert which lasted several centuries? What framework do we need to make sense of this activity? Does it even help to recognise a degree of continuity with the more attenuated liturgical ceremonies in the present Cathedral? Why, after all, has this curious practice partly survived into the present? Mere historical persistence doesn't itself clarify what the monks were doing in the choir, or why.

I recognise that, as we saw earlier in considering the Treasury, some elements of the monastic daily office can be explained in terms of the economic underpinning of the monastic institution. The monks were paid directly or indirectly to perform the liturgical office, profiting from endowments or donations from people who wished to have prayers sung on their behalf and Masses said for their benefit. But this economic aspect,

though important, does not itself explain why it was singing that was so pervasive and time-consuming for those who did it.

A second question nags at me, and I'm not sure how it is related to the first. In accounts of mediaeval 'plainchant' the words which were sung are often given remarkably little attention. Indeed in treatments of music more generally, it sometimes seems that modern composers, performers, and audiences are quite content if a text being sung is almost incomprehensible, and that it doesn't matter if the words are not decipherable or even audible. Which to me seems peculiar.

It is not a new issue. Here is Jacques of Liege, in his *Speculum Musicae,* from the second quarter of the fourteenth century:

> In a great company of judicious men, when motets in the modern manner were being sung, I observed that the question was asked, what language such singers were using, whether Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or some other, because it could not be made out what they were saying. Thus, although the moderns compose good and beautiful texts for their songs, they lose by their manner of singing, since they are not understood.
>
> (*Strunk's Source Readings In Music History*, 1998, vol 2, p. 168)

So, I will focus particularly upon the words sung in the mediaeval monastery and cathedral of Canterbury with those two questions in mind. Along the way, I want to touch upon a mosaic of interrelated motifs, without however promising an entirely coherent or compelling overall composition.

Bede

First, it's worth commenting briefly upon the earliest recorded moment in the history of music at Canterbury, which predates even the cathedral itself. The account in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* of the arrival of St Augustine in 597 A.D. includes a description of Augustine and his companions singing. Bede even specifies the text they were singing (Book I, Chap. XXV):

> Some days after, the king came into the island [of Thanet], and sitting in the open air, ordered Augustine and his companions to come and hold a conference with him. For he had taken precaution that they should not come to him in any house, lest, by so coming, according to an ancient superstition, if they practised any magical arts, they might impose upon him, and so get the better of him. But they came endued with divine, not with magic power, bearing a silver cross for their banner, and the image of our Lord and Saviour painted on a board; and chanting litanies, they offered up their prayers to the Lord for the eternal salvation both of themselves and of those to whom and for whom they had come.

> . . Accordingly he gave them an abode in the city of Canterbury, which was the metropolis of all his dominions, and, as he had promised, besides supplying them with sustenance, did not refuse them liberty to preach. It is told that, as they drew near to the city, after their manner, with the holy cross, and the image of our sovereign Lord and King, Jesus Christ, they sang in concert this litany: "We beseech thee, O Lord, for Thy great mercy, that Thy wrath and anger be turned away from this city, and from Thy holy house, for we have sinned. Hallelujah."

The antiphon indicated in this passage appears today in the *Liber Usualis* (see below) as *Deprecamur Te Domine*. However, despite Bede's account, this particular antiphon seems not to have been known until much later in Rome, let alone in Canterbury, in the time of Pope Leo, though the anachronistic choice of this text is plausible, as a processional chant diplomatically offering a prayer on behalf of the city they were approaching. In any case, Bede does not tell us what music or melody the text was sung to, and how the *Deprecamur Te Domine* would have actually sounded in 597 is a matter of tentative scholarship and aural speculation, as with much else in the history of mediaeval music. We know, for example, that an 11th-century Canterbury monk, Osbern, composed a liturgical office for the feast of St Gregory, but we can only hypothetically reconstruct the music since no written trace of it survives.

Nevertheless, mainly thanks to Bede, it used to be assumed that since Augustine had been the prior of St Andrew's monastery in Rome founded by Pope Gregory I, it was likely that Augustine's company were singing 'Gregorian' chant. But the legend that associates Gregory the Great with the beginnings of this form of chant has little historical basis, and we are unlikely to endorse a mediaeval claim that the entire corpus of 'Gregorian' music was dictated to Pope Gregory by a dove sitting on his shoulder.

Despite the association of Augustine with Gregory we cannot even be sure whether the original companions of Augustine are to be described as (Benedictine) monks or not. The question was long bedevilled by the hostility of some post-Reformation historians and antiquarians to the very notion of monks 'converting' England, and more recent research has questioned how we have traditionally envisaged sixth-century 'monasteries' or 'minsters' (see Sarah Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600 - 900*, 2006). It is only from around the time of Saint Dunstan (Archbishop 959-988) that we can be fairly confident that the Canterbury choir was occupied by a monastic community which followed, in some form, the liturgical practices of the Benedictine Rule.

Benedictine Office

But what exactly did even those later monks actually do in the choir for so many hours each day? One answer would be a standard account of the

Benedictine Office, as in this brief summary by Dom David Knowles, in his introduction to *The Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc* (1951, p. xvi):

> The core of the service in choir was the Divine Office, the *Opus Dei* of St Benedict. Of this the first and by far the longest portion was that known to St Benedict and Lanfranc as *nocturns*, but to modern monasticism as *matins*. This, beginning with an invitatory and hymn, consisted of two (or, on Sundays and greater feasts, three) divisions or *nocturns*, each made up of six psalms (or, in the case of the third nocturn, of three canticles) and three (or, on Sundays and feasts, four) lessons, each followed by a responsory. To the third nocturn were added the *Te Deum* and the Gospel of the day. In all this there were numerous grades of solemnity, implying more frequent or more elaborate chant, repetitions, incensing, etc.; these differences applied to all the parts of the Office in varying measure.
>
> Next came the office known to St Benedict and Lanfranc as *matutinae*, and to modern monks as *Lauds* (from the three last *Laudate* psalms which always occur in it); this consisted of four psalms, a canticle, the *Laudate* psalms, a chapter, response, hymn, *Benedictus* and prayers. *Prime* followed, with a hymn, three psalms and prayers; then the so-called Little Hours of *Terce*, *Sext* and *None*, consisting each of a hymn, three psalms and prayers; then *Vespers*, with four psalms, a chapter, response, hymn, *Magnificat* and prayers, and finally *Compline*, with the confession, three psalms, hymn, chapter and prayers. In St Benedict's time this had been all, save for a simple Mass on Sundays and feasts. By the eleventh century, however, much had been added…

I quote this passage mainly to indicate the scale and rather baffling complexity of the overall monastic 'liturgy', but it doesn't tell us much unless we already know what these various terms refer to. We can provide a larger framework, some of which may be more familiar or perhaps vaguely remembered, which McKinnon usefully summarises (p. 88):

> Gregorian chant exists in the context of the liturgy; the public prayer of the Christian Church. One speaks of a liturgical year and a liturgical day. The liturgical year comprises a great dramatic cycle of feast days that recapitulate each year the earthly life of Jesus Christ. These feast days centre upon two dates, the one fixed, Christmas, falling on 25 December, and the other variable, Easter, falling on the first Sunday after the spring full moon. The two commemorate, respectively, the Birth and Resurrection of Christ.
>
> The year begins with a four-week period of preparation for Christmas called Advent. Easter is similarly preceded by a preparatory season, Lent, beginning 40 days earlier on Ash Wednesday. The Easter season extends for 50 days, highlighted by Ascension Thursday on the 40th

day and concluded by Pentecost Sunday, which celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. The year is completed by the Sundays after Pentecost, which number from 23 to 28 depending on the date of Easter. In addition to this annual cycle memorializing the events of Christ's life, many days of the year are set aside to honour individual saints. . .

The liturgical day consists of Mass and Office. The latter is a series of eight services beginning with Matins (called Vigils in the Middle Ages from its placement in the early hours of the morning before daylight). Lauds, a service of praise, followed; it was timed to begin just as the first rays of the rising sun were visible through the east windows of the choir. There followed the four 'little hours' of the day: Prime, Terce, Sext and None; they were to be sung at the first, third, sixth (noon) and ninth hour of the Roman solar day, although None might be performed immediately after Sext to allow for a longer afternoon work period. Vespers were sung in the early evening followed shortly thereafter by Compline at dusk.

The main body of Office texts was provided by the Book of Psalms, which was sung in its entirety [150 psalms] in the course of a week. In addition to psalms, each Office included a strophic hynm, short scriptural passages ['readings'] and various short prayers and chants. Included also at each service, other than those of the little hours, was a biblical canticle, while Matins, the most elaborate of the Offices, had an extended series of readings. . .

It's surely a rather complex way to spend one's time, to organise or even construct time itself. But do such accounts clarify what the monks were actually 'doing' every day of their lives and why?

Liber Usualis

In one limited sense, we can know what a monastic community probably did on each separate day of the year. For example, I can consult my old 1950s copy of the *Liber Usualis* and I can partly specify what would then have been said and sung each year on, say, the feast of Saint Augustine, August 28th. The *Liber Usualis* was the modern official Catholic handbook or compendium containing instructions for what is to be said or recited on each day of the liturgical year, at least for the Mass on that day. In my single volume *Liber Usualis* a truncated version of the entry on page 1617 for the feast of Saint Augustine reads:

> Bishop, Confessor and Doctor of the Church. Double. At first and second Vespers, at *Magnificat* antiphon *O Doctor … beate Augustine*, p. 1188. Mass. *In medio*, p.1190, except the following: Collect [*given in full: a short prose text concerning Augustine*]. Commemoration of Saint Hermese

> Martyr. Collect [*given in full: a short prose text concerning Hermese*]. *Alleluiah, Alleluiah. Inveni David*, p.439. The *Credo* is said. Secret. [*given in full: another short prose text concerning Augustine*]. Secret for Saint Hermese [*given in full: another short prose text concerning Hermese*] . .

In effect, this abbreviated entry directs a user to several other pages in the *Liber Usualis*, to find the texts and the music assigned for a feast of a 'Doctor' of the Church (of which there are few, which makes this feast a special one: a 'Double'), including a particular version of the *Alleluiah* assigned to feasts of a 'Confessor Bishop' (since Augustine was both), and also to other parts of the office appropriate to a Martyr, since the feast of Saint Hermese was also on August 28th and that Saint is commemorated alongside Saint Augustine. Following these directions takes one eventually to the scores of the music to be sung for that feast-day.

The modern *Liber Usualis* runs to over 1900 pages and is not easy to navigate, despite including various indices, lists, and alphabetical tables of 'Introits, Graduals, Alleluiah Verses, Tracts, Offertories, Communions, Antiphons, Hymns, Psalms' – all terms referring to particular forms or genres of liturgical texts set to music. However, in the mediaeval period this would have involved consulting a number of separate manuscript volumes specifying different components of the overall liturgy or 'office' for any particular day, a somewhat cumbersome procedure requiring the monk in charge of arranging the daily liturgy to cross-reference and collate a number of calendars and lists or collections of compositions and readings. Needless to say, it was even more complicated to consult not just one printed compilation but several different kinds and sizes of manuscript volumes in order to find out which piece of music to sing next on a particular day. To begin with, one had to get the right Saint Augustine (28th of August is for the African Augustine, not the one who converted England).

This way of structuring each day of the year involved considerable organisation. A specific monk designated as the Cantor or Praecentor would determine the order of service in advance by consulting his collection of books but the actual performance of the texts sung in the choir would have partly relied upon the monks having previously memorised both the text and the music to be able to act upon the Cantor's promptings during the service. The first duty of a new novice was to memorise all 150 Psalms.

The text edited by Knowles known as Lanfranc's *Monastic Constitutions* outlines the further practical duties of a Cantor (p. 80)*:*

> Whenever anyone has to read or chant anything in the church the cantor shall, if need be, hear him go over his task before he performs it in public. It is the cantor's business to watch carefully at all times, so that no negligence occurs in any service in the monastery. If through forgetfulness someone fails to begin a responsory or antiphon or such-

> like when he should, or if, having begun it correctly, he goes astray in any way, the cantor should be quite ready to begin without delay what should have been begun, or to lead back into the right road one who has strayed. It is for him to decide when the chant is to be begun, and the note raised or lowered; no one may raise the note unless he begin. It is his task to set down the brethren for all duties on the tabula, paying no attention to their seniority or their personal wishes, but according to his best judgment having regard only to good performance and edification.

The Cantor selected who was to sing particular texts, though he might himself be obliged to step in. The implication of such passages is that most of the monks participated in the singing as a collective chorus but in any specific service a few would have been assigned particular singing roles, in which they would have been coached beforehand by the Cantor.

> He takes care of all the books of the house, and has them in his keeping, if his interests and learning are such as to fit him for keeping them.

The Cantor had daily recourse to the several manuscripts which specified what texts and music should be sung on a particular occasion and in what combination and order. The Preface to the 1549 first *Prayer Book* of Edward VI rather acidly remarks of the organisation of the mediaeval liturgy: 'to turn the book only was so hard and intricate a matter that many times there was more business to find out what should be read than to read it when it was found out.' It is the Cantor's 'books of the house' which now provide the evidence for what was sung during several centuries of monastic activity but in Britain relatively few of those manuscripts survived the dissolution of the monasteries.

For example, what is now known as the *Cosin Gradual* was originally written in Canterbury Christ Church around 1100 and was, for whatever reason, sent to Durham cathedral and monastery where it remains and is now available on-line in a digitised form. A browse through its several hundred pages indicates, for example, how different forms of music notation could accumulate over time yet remain side-by-side in the same liturgical manuscript, and in particular how 'scores' could later be added to the various previous marks of musical notation written directly on the texts. For example on folio 125 a 15th century fragment of polyphonic music has been squeezed into the margins of the old page. To make sense of these surviving manuscripts requires considerable expertise for which we have to rely upon generations of scholars who, not unlike the mediaeval Cantor, have had to collect, collate, and composite different and often conflicting manuscripts in order to constitute a version of what was sung or recited.

I can call upon some of those scholars to illustrate other aspects of the mediaeval monastic liturgy by considering the Office for the feast-day of Thomas Becket, 'Saint Thomas of Canterbury', celebrated on the date of his death, 29th of December. In a 1988 article Andrew Hughes argued that:

> The texts and chants of the main rhymed Office for the feast of St Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, were composed by Abbot Benedict of Peterborough between 1170 (the year of Thomas's martyrdom) and 1177 (or perhaps 1193). A chronicler of Peterborough writes that Benedict 'made the whole office, and I say the whole thing because he noted [put musical notes to] the poetry excellently with chant'. Abbot Benedict would have written a monastic office, with 13 antiphons, 12 lessons and responsories at Matins rather than the 9 antiphons, lessons and responsories typical of a secular office (that is, for a church, collegiate chapel or cathedral). In 1892 the monastic text was published, without the chant (*Analecta hymnica* [Ah], xiii, no 92). . . ('Chants in the Rhymed Office of St Thomas of Canterbury', *Early Music,* May, 1988).

It is unusual to have a named mediaeval composer of a specific Office but Benedict of Peterborough had been a monk at Christ Church, and compiled the written records of the first miracles of St Thomas which provided the basis for depicting the numerous miracles in the windows around both the shrine and the choir. As we have seen, those miracle windows were organised so that any pilgrim, of whatever gender, age, rank or position, could have had pointed out to him or her by a clerk a specific miracle attributed to St Thomas appropriate to their individual condition, and those miracle windows surrounding the choir would obviously have been familiar to the chanting monks. Designing a complex set of multi-panel windows was perhaps not unlike assembling a combination or composition of several different texts and music.

What is celebrated in the Becket Office is both an historical individual and the transition of Becket into a martyr and miracle-working saint who is now present in heaven. That trans-historical event is affirmed in both the windows and the music of the liturgy annually performed in the cathedral choir. This involves a fundamentally theological notion of how the music of a liturgical Office relates to the present 'now', as we will consider shortly.

For the moment, let us begin a search to find out what was going on in the mediaeval choir at Canterbury on Becket's own feast-day. Prompted by the reference in Hughes' article, I can start by consulting the *Analecta hymnica* which was published over several decades in 55 substantial volumes. The monastic Office for *Thoma Cantuariensi* is in volume 13 at page 238ff, which I can download from the Internet Archive website. There are three

pages of short rhyming Latin texts and a full page of scholarly apparatus about manuscript sources. But unfortunately there is no music.

I could also download another late 19th century publication known as the *Breviarium ad usum…Sarum* published by Francis Procter and Christopher Wordsworth in 1882, which includes the Latin text of a Becket feast-day Office, but again no music. So I might also try to find a printed copy of *Antiphonale ad Usum Ecclesiae Sarum,* (Paris, 1519) which apparently has the music for the antiphons in that version of the Becket office. But since that 'Sarum' version was in use at Salisbury Cathedral, not Canterbury Christ Church, and was a reduced 'secular' version of the monastic office, it is still not quite what I am looking for.

In 2001 a composite volume entitled *Mediaeval Hagiography*, edited by Thomas Head, included a chapter entitled 'Liturgical Offices for the cult of Saint Thomas Becket', edited and translated by Sherry Reames. This included translations into English of versions of both the Office for Thomas's Feast Day (December 29th) and the Office for the Translation (July 7th) which commemorated the day in 1220 when Becket's remains were finally moved from the crypt to the splendid new shrine. Again however her text is basically that of the 1882 edition of the *Breviarium ad usum…Sarum* and has no music. However, it usefully includes several more extended versions than the Procter -Wordsworth edition of the 'readings' or 'lessons' which were part of Matins.

In 2004 Kay Brainerd Slocum published *Liturgies in Honour of Thomas Becket*, a book-length study which includes both the liturgical texts and the music for Matins, Lauds, and Second Vespers for the feast-day Office (taking about 40 pages), together with different surviving versions from other breviaries (another 30 pages of text), followed by a further 50 pages of both text and music for the Office for the Translation.

At last, her version of the December 29th Office is primarily based upon the specifically monastic office, as found in a notated Breviary from the Priory of Saint Pancras at Lewes which is now Manuscript 369 in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. The manuscript dates from about 1260 to 1300 and the Lewes Priory was a Cluniac monastery. This seems to be as near as I can get to how Benedict of Peterborough's office might have sounded in Canterbury. I am disappointed that the music is given by Slocum in modern notation, since the manuscript is in a 'Gregorian' format which I happen to think suggests a quite different 'feel' for how the notes are to be sung.

On the other hand, I am grateful that Slocum has provided (on page 167) an overall schema of the structure of the monastic office, so that the arrangement of Matins for December 29th is very clear:

	Invitatorium
Antiphon : Adsunt Thome,	with Psalm 94:57 Venite
Hymn: Martir Dei	

First Nocturn

Antiphon 1: Summo sacerdocio, with Psalm 1: Beatus vir
Antiphon 2: Monachus sub clerico, with Psalm 2: Quare fremuerunt
Antiphon 3: Cultor agri Domini, with Psalm 4: Cum invocarem
Antiphon 4: Nec in agnos, with Psalm 5: Verba mea
Antiphon 5: Exulat vir, with Psalm 8: Domine Dominus
Antiphon 6: Exulantis predia, with Psalm 10: In Domino confido
Lesson 1, with Responsory 1: Studens livor
Lesson 2, with Responsory 2: Thomas manum
Lesson 3, with Responsory 3: Lapis iste
Lesson 4, with Responsory 4: Post sex annos

Second Nocturn

Antiphon 7: Satane satellites, with Psalm 14: Domini quis
Antiphon 8: Strictis Thomas, with Psalm 20: Domine in virtute
Antiphon 9: Hosti pandit ostium, with Psahn 23: Domine est terra
Antiphon 10: Patrem nati perimunt, with Psalm 63: Exaudi Deus
Antiphon 11: Sol inclinans radios, with Psalm 64: Te decet hymnus
Antiphon 12: Fusum spargunt, with Psalm 91: Bonum est confiteri
Lesson 5, with Responsory 5: Iacet granum
Lesson 6, with Responsory 6: Ex summa rerum
Lesson 7, with Responsory 7: Mundi florem
Lesson 8, with Responsory 8: Christe Jesu

Third Nocturn

Ad cantica: Fragrat virtus
(Beatus vir qui in sapiencia) [Ecclesiasticus 14:22; 15 3-4, 6]
Lesson 9, with Responsory 9: Ferro pressos
Lesson 10, with Responsory 10: Thome cedunt
Lesson 11, with Responsory 11: Novis fulget
Lesson 12, with Responsory 12: Jesu bone

That's a lot of singing. In addition, fuller versions of the nine lessons or readings in the text of the Sarum version which she also includes (pages 212-222) are given in Latin and English and can be compared with the much shorter twelve lessons of the monastic office in the Lewes manuscript (page 174–180, 186–192, 196–202).

Neither Reames nor Slocum include the texts of the Psalms which were obviously a considerable component of the actual singing of the complete Office. One might simply assume that the Psalms are easily available to any reader. But which version, translation, and language would properly match the text of the Psalms as originally recited in the Becket Offices? Simply consulting the English Authorised Version of the Bible is hardly

appropriate. What is however very striking is how many pages it takes, even excluding the Psalms, for just this one liturgical Office.

By this stage you might be recalling the 1549 *Prayer Book* complaint: 'there was more business to find out what should be read than to read it when it was found out.' After all, relatively few people are likely to consult these scholarly studies, and we might suppose that we can surely rely instead on modern recordings to make the actual music of the Becket office more easily available to us. This is however only partly the case, particularly if we now compare some available recordings with the scholarly studies so far mentioned.

three recordings

Three CDs used to be sold regularly in the Cathedral gift shop: *Gregorian Chant from Canterbury Cathedral for the feast of St Thomas of Canterbury*, by the Lay Clerks of Canterbury Cathedral directed by David Flood (1994, MET 1003); a 1996 recording entitled *Vespers from Canterbury: Gregorian chant for St Thomas Becket*, by the Schola Gregorianum of Cambridge (PT9599); and *Gregorian Chant: Pentecost at Pontigny: music in honour of three archbishops of Canterbury*, again by the Schola Gregorianum of Cambridge and directed by Mary Berry (1993, HAVPCD 161). The three archbishops were Becket, Stephen Langton, and Edmund of Abingdon.

The CD entitled *Gregorian Chant from Canterbury Cathedral for the feast of St Thomas of Canterbury,* includes the Mass for the December 29th feast-day (tracks 1 to 12) and 'The Office of Matins' for the same day (tracks 14 to 22). The Matins section begins with the Invitatory:

> Assunt Thomae solemnia.
> Virgo mater jubilet ecclesia.

Then the whole of Psalm 94 is sung in Latin, and translated in full in the liner notes. A listener might wonder what this Psalm has to do with Becket, and as we listen to the whole Psalm we realise that one phrase from the Invitatory is regularly interspersed and repeated throughout the singing of the Psalm. These five insertions are not indicated in the included Latin text or its translation, and it is not made clear that this Psalm was simply a standard opening for Matins, not specially chosen for Becket's feast, so it is the repetitions of the verse 'Virgo mater jubilet ecclesia' ('Let the virgin mother church rejoice') which indicates the celebration of a martyr, as does the hymn. And so the singing of this opening Psalm takes rather longer than one might have anticipated.

There are then five tracks entitled Responsory I, III, VII, IX, XII and a glance at the schema given above will show where they fit in the overall structure of the Matins. But the full schema also indicates how much of the Office is 'missing' from the CD, not only the seven other Responsories but all the 12 Antiphons and their 12 related Psalms, and all the readings.

Those five Responsories together take up only about 15 minutes and simply to listen to them consecutively would be very misleading indeed, not only eliding the considerable amounts of both sung and recited material which would have variously occurred between these numbered Responsories but also the overall length of time that would have passed between Responsory 1 and Responsory 12. Moreover, to listen to the words of these five responsories is probably to be very puzzled indeed.

Responsory I is translated in the liner notes as :

> The ill-willed beginner Thomas consigns to humility; the ill-willed type however, he condemns to exile. Everything turns out the same to the wise. Sex, age, rank or condition, he rejoices not in position.

I'm not sure this makes much sense at all. The translator is named as Tim Smithies who is also credited as the recording producer. But the CD as a whole is issued as by 'The Lay Clerks of Canterbury Cathedral and the Master of the Choristers David Flood.'

If the Lay Clerks or the choristers were ever told to sing the Latin text as somehow meaning what this translation offers I am astonished, and can only assume that David Flood rehearsed them to sing in Latin without ever explaining what the text actually meant. This is not simply a matter of an inadequate grasp of Latin but surely the result of not having read the lesson (*lectio*, reading) to which this is a Responsory, an option which is not available to a listener of the CD since no lessons are included. As we will see later, what is at issue is the overall relation between text and music, but first here are two more adequate translations of this Responsory, from Slocum :

> Malice eager for the punishment of Thomas,
> condemns the family of Thomas to exile.
> All his relatives go forth together.
> Rank sex, age, status,
> here enjoys no exemption.

and from Reames:

> Envy, eager to punish Thomas, condemns Thomas's family to exile.
> His whole kindred departs together.
> State of life, sex, age, rank – these here enjoyed no privilege at all.

Reames's edition (page 568) gives Lesson 2 of the Sarum version as beginning:

> Meanwhile his enemies confiscated everything in England which belonged to the Archbishop, ravaged his estates, pillaged his

possessions, and devised a new kind of punishment by outlawing his entire family at once. All those who were his friends or members of his household, or who were alleged to belong to him in any way, were banished, regardless of their own rank or fortune, merit or state of life, age or sex. Even elderly and decrepit men, infants crying in their cradles, and women ready to collapse in childbirth were sent into exile.

So, whatever the incoherent CD translation says, this malicious act of exiling is clearly what is referred to in the Responsory, especially since the vindictive action would already have been registered earlier in Matins, in Antiphon 6: *Exulantis predia*, to be sung with Psalm 10, *In Domino confido*, but neither the Lesson nor that antiphon are included on the CD.

I have some sympathy for the CD translator since this is the Latin:

Studens livor Thome supplicio
Thome genus damnat exilio.
Tota simul exit cognacio.
Ordo, sexus, etas, condicio,
Nullo gaudet hic privilegio.

Benedict of Peterborough (assuming his authorship) plays with echoing words, rhymes, metrics, and some of the vocabulary used in the prose lesson is unusual. But the CD translation simply shows no awareness of that narrative lesson. Which is itself a cautionary lesson. Which we can pursue later.

Take the next Responsory (III) on the CD, oddly entitled 'Lapisiste' instead of 'Lapis iste', which is translated in the CD notes as:

The stone that is hammered for six years, as it is polished, so it is rendered all square. He who yields less is yielded more. The furnace proves the gold and it burns not, the house on firm ground shakes not with the wind.

This makes some mangled sense, but again has failed to recognise the context of the lesson to which it is a Responsory:

Remaining in exile for six years, he was afflicted by varied and innumerable injuries, and like the living stone in the structure of the heavenly edifice, he was squared by all kinds of blows and oppressions; the more he was struck so that he might fall, the more he was proven to stand firm and immovable. For, just as gold cannot be burned when it is so tested, a house founded upon a firm rock cannot be pulled down.

Moreover, several other lessons, antiphons, and responsories in the Office also use metaphors of stone and gold, not least because the Latin term 'lapis' can refer both to a building stone and to a precious stone or jewel, which is then further associated with the word 'corona' which can mean both 'crown' and the top of a head. As a Canterbury monk, Benedict would have been well aware not only of the magnificent well-cut stone-work of the cathedral itself but also of the jewels encrusting Becket's shrine and the specific significance of the striking of the crown of his head by the murderous knights, which perhaps even prompted the construction of the so-called 'corona' at the east end of the cathedral.

Reames's translation of Lesson 3 (p. 569) helpfully includes the biblical references in the text to which Responsory III is responding:

> Thus for six successive years he lived in exile, afflicted with diverse and countless injustices. Like a living stone [*1 Peter* 2:4-5] that is shaped for building the heavenly palace by many kinds of carving and compression [see *Isaiah* 28:16], so the greater the pressure on him to fall, the more firmly and immovably he was proved to stand. Nor indeed with such effort could assayed gold be burned up [see *Wisdom* 3:5-6; *Zechariah* 13:9].

The image of a heavenly palace built in stone was already introduced in the First Vespers of the Office with the repeated verse '*Caelum domo coummutans lutea*', which translates as 'exchanging a house of clay for a heavenly abode', and several other parts of the Office emphasise images to do with houses, heavenly mansions, and so on. Clearly, just as the Responsories echo the lessons, those lessons are themselves saturated with biblical references. Which would not have been a problem for a mediaeval monk but may be for a modern listener.

One interesting example occurs in the next responsory recorded on this CD. Responsory VII is translated as:

> While Rachel weeps the flowers of the world are washed away but as she stops so we begin to complain. As Thomas cut down goes to his funeral, a new Abel steps up to the challenge. The sound of bloodshed, the splash of spilling brains fills the air with sudden panic.

Again, even ignoring how the translation badly misreads the Latin, the likely question for anyone listening today to this responsory is what the references to Rachel and to a new Abel have to do with Thomas Becket.

The text implicitly invokes and takes for granted a passage in *Matthew* (23:35) which refers to 'all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah . . whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar', which itself refers to the opening verses of *Zechariah* and to the 24th chapter of *II Chronicles*. Becket too was

murdered in his own sanctuary. Abel as well as being the very first victim of a murder was also the first shepherd, and Becket throughout the Office is celebrated as the *pastor bonus*, the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, a notion which is the focus of the excerpts from *John* chapter 10 and from a homily by Saint Gregory which together comprise one version of Lesson 7 for which this is the Responsory.

As for Rachel, there is a double echo, to *Jeremiah* chapter 31: 'a voice is heard in Rama, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not', which is quoted in Lesson 6 in the context of describing the reaction to Becket's murder. The same quotation was also used as the text of the *Communion* for the Mass of the Holy Innocents which occurs in the liturgical calendar on December 28th, the day before Becket's feast-day (see *Matthew* 2: 18) and had also provided the text for a notorious early carol concerning Becket, *In Rama sonat gemitus*, written as a lament during his exile and including an audacious reference to Henry II as Herod, which translates as:

> A voice is heard in Rama, wailing and lamenting: it is the voice of the Rachel of England, humiliated by a descendant of Herod. For behold her first-born son, the Joseph of Canterbury, exiled as if he had been sold, has taken up his abode in the Egypt of France.

Though not itself a liturgical text this carol was popular and the notion of Becket as the Joseph of Canterbury effectively went viral, intertwining the tale of Joseph and the Egyptian Pharaoh with that of Thomas and King Henry, with Rachel figuring as the distraught 'mother church' of England, Canterbury Cathedral.

I could similarly comment upon the other responsories included on this CD, and also the seven which are not. But I hope the point has been sufficiently made: that any attempt to conjure up 'the music' for the liturgical office of the feast of Saint Thomas by listening to this recording is pretty hopeless without sufficient access to the range of texts which are set to the music.

Yet I can recognise that any recording which tried to include all of the 40 or so pieces of music and also the many readings which were an integral and interwoven part of Benedict's rhymed office would take a considerable time to listen to and would be somewhat unlikely to appeal to many people as a listening experience.

Vespers

So let us look, in thankfully less detail, at the second CD which also seems from its title to offer a recording of another part of the Office for Becket's feast: *Vespers from Canterbury: Gregorian chant for St Thomas Becket*, by the Schola Gregorianum of Cambridge (PT9599). A liner note by Mary Berry says, promisingly:

> It is rare to find intact the office music for the feast of St Thomas. In nearly all sources the relevant pages had been torn out or defaced in the 16th century by order of Henry VIII. However in an early 13th century noted [with musical notation] Breviary from Lewes Priory it appears in pristine condition and it is from this source that the music for the recording has been transcribed.

This Lewes Breviary was also the main basis for Slocomb's study. There are 12 tracks on the *Vespers* CD, the first of which is the early nonliturgical lament *In Rama sonat gemitus* just mentioned, and there are four short compositions taken from Benedict's rhyming office, while the longest track of nearly 40 minutes comprises the office of Lauds for the December 29th feast-day.

The accompanying insert provides both the Latin texts and translations for the four short pieces but rather little indication of how those pieces would have fitted into the structure of the liturgy:

> The responsory *Subvenite* and the short serene antiphon *Chorus angelorum* call upon the hosts of heaven to welcome Thomas and lead him to Paradise. They were the normal chant sung at the death of a monk. During his exile in France Thomas had asked for, and received from the hands of the Pope, a rough woollen monastic habit and he had lived to the full the life of a monk in the great Cistercian abbey Pontigny before returning from exile. The sequence *Se mercedi et corone* describes the fortitude of Thomas, the 'athlete of Christ', as he faced his assailants. This is the sequence that would have been sung in Canterbury itself on Thomas's yearly feast-day. The three Matins responsories, the music for the office of Lauds, and the merry little Magnificat antiphon *Felix locus* all come from Benedict of Peterborough's rhyming office *Studens livor*.

However, this CD was clearly not designed with an emphasis on the shape of the liturgy but rather as evoking some kind of frisson upon listening to music related to Becket's murder. The liner note emphasises this selling angle:

> The story of *The Martyrdom of St Thomas Becket* has been told many times. There are contemporary eyewitness accounts of how the four knights rushed in and slew the Archbishop in his own Cathedral of Canterbury; there are scholarly modern historical studies; the story is told in the stained-glass windows of the Cathedral itself; and of course there are Chaucer's entertaining *Canterbury Tales* and his lively descriptions of the motley crowd of pilgrims, in holiday mood, making their way to the shrine of Thomas.

> This recording approaches the story from another angle: it is an attempt to capture through music each major act of the grim drama as it unfolds. There is a continuous line of melody running through it, from the time of Thomas's exile (1164 to 70), to the official recognition of him by the church as a Saint and Martyr – his canonisation by Pope Alexander III on Ash Wednesday 21 February 1173, a day of penance which ended as a day of rejoicing.

The CD is thus a compilation of music variously associated with Becket, which presents itself as a kind of dramatic reconstruction of aspects of Becket's death and canonisation. Including one track which is simply the evocative ringing of a death knell on a solemnly mournful bell 'based on the plaintive little pattern of four repeated notes similar to what must have been heard in the country and all over Europe from time immemorial.' The final track is again a bell-ringing which lasts nearly two minutes and according to the sleeve notes 'was rung to honour Thomas's canonisation as a saint and Martyr'.

This 1996 compilation was produced not by a major recording company or by the Cathedral itself, but by a company called Past Times, a chain of commercial shops with a special line in producing books, records, jewellery, scarves and a range of items which might be called nostalgia commodities, since the company traded upon a once wide-spread consumer interest in purchasable items clearly marked by an explicit association with 'past times'. Perhaps symptomatically, the Past Times company which used to have a busy and popular shop on the High Street in Canterbury, has long gone out of business and may not itself be much remembered by now.

The obvious point to make is that the selection of music on this CD has more to do with the gift shop than with, say, any devotional celebration of St Thomas. So it is left somewhat unclear what the relation is between these pieces of music and in particular what kind of listening is invited, including my act of listening to them now. When hearing that bell on the recording am I supposed to be doing something more or less musically similar to 'entering' the nave and registering, like the teenager I quoted much earlier, that it 'smells of history'?

This is not to criticise the commercial decisions behind the production of this CD but to raise questions about the impression given of the music in such recordings. I don't mean that the music itself is an unreliable reconstruction, but that listening to it in this form can be not just inadequate but misleading. Let me begin to say why.

Despite the title, the CD does not include the Vespers for Becket's own feast-day but instead some fifteen minutes of the Vespers which would probably have been sung on December 29th 1170, allegedly interrupted by the murderous knights – though that day's Vespers would obviously have had no direct relevance to Becket before his martyrdom had even occurred. The four Psalms for that Vespers are sung in full but indicated in the liner

note only by their number and opening line. The texts for the seven Psalms chanted at Lauds are similarly indicated in the liner notes, and sung in Latin, though only the antiphon for each Psalm is translated in full. The listener is thereby assumed either to have sufficient Latin or not to be concerned with what the Psalm texts say. Or to have a Psalter to hand, making sure that they are using the appropriate numbering of the Psalms (the Vulgate), and being alert to when the singing voices switch to the partial or full text of the various antiphons, the first phrase of which is sung before each Psalm and the full antiphon then sung after the Psalm. We are back to juggling different books.

What then do we make of the first Lauds antiphon, the succinct *Granum cadit,* translated as:

> The grain of corn falls to the ground: it produces an abundance of wheat.
> The vase of perfume is broken: the essence of the ointment gives forth a sweet fragrance.

Lauds always followed upon the completion of the third nocturn of Matins so those singing Lauds would already have listened to 12 readings during Matins, in which a similar but not identical text occurs (as the Responsory to Lesson 5, Slocum, page 186, or to Lesson 3 in the 'Sarum' version, Slocum, page 215). Putting the Lauds antiphon in the context of those fuller Responsories and the Matins readings associated with them considerably elaborates and enriches the imagery of the brief Lauds version of the antiphon.

R. Jacet granum oppressum palea,
Justus coesus pravorum framea,
Coelum domo commutans lutea.
V. Cadit custos vitis in vinea,
Dux in castris, cultor in area,
Coelum domo commutans lutea.

R. The grain of wheat lies smothered by the chaff,
the just man slain by the sword of sinners.
Changing his house of clay for heaven.
V. The vine-keeper dies in his vineyard,
the general in his camp, the husbandman on the place of his toil.
Changing his house of clay for heaven.

We can by now perhaps recognise how some of these themes are interwoven, and appreciate that a particular combination of text and music could potentially be deployed in different variations and also echoed across multiple settings in the overall Becket Office.

The third brief Lauds antiphon on this CD is:

> Water from Thomas, changing its colour five times, was once transformed into milk, four times into blood.

A rather startling idea. Again, if we had heard the lessons for Matins, several of which recount other miracles, we would already be attuned to this somewhat bizarre claim about the especially holy mixture of water and blood, which also features in several of the miracle windows.

However, this CD, like the previous one, does not include any of the lessons or readings, though an attentive listening might register an interplay between the texts of the various tracks, and especially the long sequence *Spe mercedis et corone*. Listening to the CD with Slocum and Reames to hand, as well as a Vulgate Bible, including a Latin Psalter, again brings home the scale and complexity of this single Office. Slocum's book, which gives a magnificently detailed account of the Becket Office(s), is nearly 400 pages long. Should I now go in search of another 364 similar books for the other days of the liturgical year?

Stevens

Let me instead look briefly at the third CD I listed and also consider a scholar I haven't yet mentioned. In 1970, the 800th anniversary of Becket's martyrdom, Denis Stevens published one of the most interesting and influential early articles on music and Becket, 'Music in honour of Saint Thomas Of Canterbury', in *The Music Quarterly* for July 1970, which 'endeavoured to analyse and discuss all the polyphonic works written about Becket from c. 1165 to the end of the 16th century and in addition a representative number of monophonic compositions.' Also in 1970 Stevens published a booklet entitled *Music in honour of Saint Thomas of Canterbury* which presented music scores in modern notation of twelve compositions discussed in the article, and in 1974 an LP record of some of the music in the booklet. His work can be seen in relation to the third CD I earlier listed.

That CD, rather oddly entitled *Gregorian chant: Pentecost at Pontigny,* includes versions of both *In Rama sonat gemitus* and *Jacet granum* we have already considered and also a track entitled *Thomas gemma*, all of which were discussed in the article by Stevens. But the version of *Jacet granum* Stevens included in his booklet and designated as *Januam /Jacinthus/ Jacet granum* was rather different, since it involves the intertwining of two texts (*Januam* . . and *Jacinthus* . .) on which he comments in his article:

> The only source for this work, which deserves attention on many counts, is a collection of miscellaneous leaves from medieval manuscripts in the library of New College, Oxford. Characterized by smooth, rich and elegant four-part harmony this motet presents two

texts sung simultaneously by alto voices, supported by a freely composed tenor and by the tenor of the responsory.

The responsory is *Jacet granum oppressum palea,* but its text is not sung though its chant provides a fourth instrumental or possibly vocalised part. In the booklet Stevens comments:

> This is the earliest motet as far as is known at present with a *solus tenor* – a substitute line (presumably intended for organ) which combines the outline of the chant in the tenor with the essential notes of the filler. Since the motet is undoubtedly English in origin, it may be that this device of the *solus tenor* may also be considered an English invention. After a few introductory bars, the two voices exchange their set patterns of notes and rests with cosmic regularity almost to the very end, while the instrumental parts go their own way, freely alternating notes and rests in order to maintain a smooth and elegant harmonic flow. It may have been composed as a double trope to the responsory *Jacet granum* (whose chant appears complete in the tenor) sung in procession on the eve of 29 December, or at first Vespers on 7 July [Feast of the Translation].

This use of a *solus tenor* is clearly the feature of particular musical interest to Stevens. However, in the article Stevens also summarises the two texts:

> The upper voice-part sings of the martyrdom which opened for Thomas the gates of glory, and then describes his abstinence, his devotion to the cause of the Church even during the long years of exile, his murder at the hands of sacrilegious knights, and his power to heal and forgive sinners. The second voice, in complete contrast, alternates couplet by couplet the praise of Thomas and the story of Hyacinth: *Jacinctus in saltibus*. Hyacinth, a son of Amyclas and Diomede, was loved by both Apollo and Zephyrus. But since he returned only Apollo's love, Zephyrus took revenge when he saw them playing one day, by fiercely throwing the discus at Hyacinth's head. The boy was killed at once, and the blood flowing from his head was changed by the sorrowing Apollo into the flower called hyacinth. This pagan parallel to a Christian martyrdom, although by no means unusual in the Middle Ages, rarely penetrated into musical compositions, but in this case it is effectively used as a foil to the historical and moral tone of the other text.

We might be somewhat perplexed at this 'pagan parallel' (!) and it certainly makes a considerable difference which 'version' of a composition entitled *Jacet granum* we find ourselves listening to on a recording! But was the poly-text version ever actually sung in the choir of Canterbury Cathedral? By monks who would have been familiar with the tale of

Hyacinth? As part of the Office? Or is this an instance where a liturgical chant has become simply the material for a 'show' piece, an exercise in musical composition?

The *Jacet granum* on the CD is given a specific liturgical context since it is the processional responsory as sung in the Sarum rite as a prelude to the secular Office for Thomas and is followed on the CD by *Clangat pastor in tuba cornea*, a definitely related 'prosa' enthusiastically sung in the procession as each line of verse ends in an extensive '—ea', thereby inviting a rousing choral participation which is further encouraged by the vigorous opening word *Clangat*: 'The shepherd blows his horn'. The partly similar refrain *Clangat tuba* has already figured in a previous track, *Clangat tuba martyr Thoma*, a 15th-century carol partly in Latin and partly in English – though in neither case is it made clear that the odd but very popular notion of Thomas blowing a trumpet originally derived from a Lesson in the Office based upon a misunderstanding of an anecdote about Becket as a soldier.

Another track, entitled *Thomas gemma*, is perhaps a liturgical composition but also deploys the two-text device of *Januam /Jacinthus/ Jacet granum*. The version on the CD is glossed by Mary Berry:

> *Thomas Gemma/Thomas caesus* is a 13th century motet in honour of Thomas Becket and a second Thomas, Thomas de Halys, a Benedictine monk of Dover Priory, who met a violent death on 2nd of August 1295. It is a strange text, witty, inventive, intended both to edify and to entertain. Of the four voices, the two basses are used throughout as though they were instruments, hoqueting at speed on vowel sounds. The two tenors divide the text between them, one singing about Thomas of Canterbury, the other about Thomas of Dover. The words are made to follow each other, copy each other, sound alike and rhyme, both phonetically and rhythmically.

Here is another comment on the same piece, by Frank Ll. Harrison in his *Music in Medieval England,* 1963, p.144:

> *Thomas gemma Cantuariae - Thomas caesus in Doveria*, a somewhat later work (c. 1300), written in praise of St. Thomas of Canterbury and Thomas de la Hale (d. 1295) of Dover Priory, has an ingenious combination of rondellus and variation techniques. In its general style it is a motet, but it is not based on plainsong. In form, it consists of twenty-seven sections, each a variant of a basic phrase, with an introduction and a coda. The phrase is varied by interchange between the two tenors and between the two upper parts, by simple ornamentation, and by the writing of new melodies.

Any Canterbury monks who sang this piece would have known the story of Thomas de la Hale, since Dover Priory was a daughter house of

Canterbury Christ Church, and they would be commemorating and celebrating both martyrdoms. But this two-fold history is unlikely to arouse much interest in a modern listener trying to hear the two different texts, since their attention will probably be on the virtuoso aspect of the piece, 'an ingenious combination of rondellus and variation techniques', and perhaps registering it primarily as a contribution to understanding the development of such techniques, a moment in the history of music not of martyrdoms.

I began these comments on the choir by noting the double function of the mediaeval cathedral, as pilgrims' shrine and monastery church, compared with today's tourist target and Anglican church. We can also consider the double function of these particular musical compositions, as indicated in a phrase by Mary Berry, 'to edify and entertain'. She remarks elsewhere on one CD that 'in the present recording a selection has been made of the finest and most characteristic antiphons and responsaries in the Saint Thomas office of Matins' but also that Psalm 20 is included since 'the texts of the gradual and the offertory are taken' from that Psalm'. Two rather different interests are being catered for, an aesthetic appreciation of 'the finest' music and a concern with the unusual inter-relations of texts, but a certain fissure can emerge between them.

'listening to music'

With that in mind, I want briefly to comment on three other pieces included in the booklet by Stevens. Item 5 is entitled *Opem nobis/ Salve Thoma/ Pastor Caesus. Opem nobis* is one of the antiphons from Lauds on the *Vespers* CD as the antiphon to the *Benedictus* (the Canticle of Zachary). The Stevens booklet prints another two-text composition which plays off the text and chant of the *Opem nobis* against that of *Salve Thoma*, which is the antiphon of the *Magnificat* sung at Second Vespers of the Becket feast (Slocum page 150), and with a third and fourth (instrumental?) part based upon the chant of *Pastor Caesus*, which is the opening antiphon of First Vespers (Slocum page 169). So we have a combination of three different liturgical texts and four chants interwoven into a single composition. But was this written for liturgical edification or simply as some kind of musical exercise?

Matters get more complicated. Item 9 in the booklet is a *Credo* attributed to Lionel Power (whom we will meet later) which uses as its foundation the chant, but not the text, of the same *Opem nobis* antiphon from Lauds. And the final item in the booklet is a five-part motet entitled *Opem nobis O Thoma* which is found in the 1595 reprint of Palestrina's fifth book of five-part motets which originally appeared in 1584, a piece which may have been composed by either Palestrina or a pupil.

These three compositions taken together encapsulate in miniature a movement from, or transformation of, a specific 'Gregorian' antiphon through Lionel Power to Palestrina, from liturgical function to aesthetic

appreciation. One indicator of that change is that it is very easy to find recordings of compositions by Palestrina, including several Masses (he wrote 105) but almost none of those recordings will include the readings from any divine office, or even the Gospel and Epistle of the Mass at which those compositions might be sung, even though some are 'named' after specific feast-days. In effect, the musical component of the composition has become increasingly separated out from any significant interest in the liturgical texts to which the music was set.

For example, there is also a *Credo* on the second CD I considered, which includes the 'Mass' for the December 29th feast-day (tracks 1 to 12) but we now take it for granted that we will not of course hear the recording of an entire Mass but only of the 'musical' elements. In the case of a Mass attributed to a named composer (Mozart wrote 18 Masses just in the key of C) we are more likely to know, but without thinking very much about it, that in-between the familiar components, the *Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei,* the entire celebration of the Mass would have occurred. We have also become used to the notion that the familiar five music compositions should have a degree of musical coherence indicating 'A Mass by XYZ' – as we will see in relation to Power and Dunstable. In other words, the Mass has become a kind of musical experience in five movements.

The overall arrangement of such recordings reinforces the assumption that one is listening to a kind of concert, in which a Mass is 'performed' as more or less a symphony or other musical genre might be. But the Gospel and Epistle and the other specifically chosen texts of a Mass were not simply background scaffolding for pleasing music. Those elements and the Psalms and readings which were an integral part of the monastic Office would have provided a continuous sequence of text and music linking and connecting what are now largely treated as individual tracks on recordings. The stipulated reading or intoning of substantial passages from accounts of Thomas's life and death in the 'lessons' would have ensured that a specific set of events was being commemorated in the celebration of the Office. The details of the *historia* of Becket were recalled in the readings not only as historical narrative but also to highlight the virtues and merits of a Saint. The inclusion of this historical-hagioraphical genre alongside and interacting with the several biblical texts was what made sense of those antiphons and responsories in the Office as sung in the monastic choir. Omitting those readings and the multiple resonances they generate leaves one with 'the music'. But the monks were not primarily 'listening to music'.

2,175 CDs

We can again go back to the question of 'what' the mediaeval Canterbury monks were doing, and why. Now with a rather more complex sense of the 'what'. And also recognising why it is highly unlikely ever to hear a full recording of any liturgical office, except perhaps by replaying a 'live stream'

of an actual liturgical occasion. Certainly a scholarly recording of the entire Gregorian annual monastic office is inconceivable. Becket's feast-day on December 29th was just one Office.

Think of listening to a complete recording of the contents of the *Liber Usualis* and all the other service-books needed by a monastic Cantor, arranged so as to reconstruct one continuous liturgical year. It would take several hundred hours of recordings and involve listening for about eight hours a day. Each monk would on average have been singing or listening to the liturgical texts for perhaps 3,000 hours each year. Including the readings and the Psalms which are almost invariably omitted from commercial recordings of monastic music yet comprised the bulk of the daily offices. If we wanted to record the total Benedictine annual Office we would need perhaps 2,175 CDs of about 80 minutes each. Or a rather crowded hard drive or cloud account.

Moreover, any attempt to reconstruct mediaeval monastic music involves not only interpreting whatever evidence remains for the texts and music but also imagining the entire ceremonial context in which that music was sung, including, indeed, a whole way of life.

Obviously, listening to any such gargantuan recording in one's own home, sitting on a couch with a hi-fi system and consulting numerous pages of liner notes and translations, would not be at all the same experience as sitting in a choir stall and taking part in a daily communal chant. And any such exercise would be radically different from recording or listening to, say, the entire works of Mozart or Mahler, or even of trying to compile a collection of all European music between 1900 and 1914. I wouldn't, of course, actually want to sit and listen to three thousand hours of chant and readings. Even to listen to any music for that length of time. So why did the monks do it anyway?

Which takes us back to my earlier questions. What were the monks themselves 'doing' and why? If the model of a thousand-year-long ongoing musical concert is even less appropriate than we might have imagined, what kind of model might we now suggest?

open source

One partly plausible modern analogue might be to regard the Benedictine Office, and even the whole Latin liturgy, as akin to a repertoire of Open Source Software, a vast library of available off-the-shelf texts and compositions which could be re-combined, composited, revised, rearranged, like having passages of potential programs in thousands of bits of re-usable code packages. The received or amended selection of texts and music for each day was a kind of combinatory, composed mainly from elements also used on other days, though it was possible to add new pieces for a newly instituted feast-day, that of a recent martyr for example. A local modification might be implemented at a single location or a more extensive

revision might be centrally undertaken. Saint Bernard, for example, in the 1140s allegedly rewrote all the antiphons for the Cistercian order. Almost ironically, one of the preoccupations of the late mediaeval reform of the monastic orders across Europe was to arrive at considerable homogeneity in liturgical practices, while allowing a degree of local variation. An important moment in the revival of monastic communities in England was the agreement on what was called the *Regularis Concordia,* a great deal of which was devoted to the minutiae of the divine office.

At another level, the very fabric of Gregorian chant (to retain that useful if misleading term) was itself made up, as it were, of prefabricated units. To read a 'traditional' (Solesme) annotated plainchant score is to recognise that the music consists of a sequence not so much of individual notes as of clusters of notes, the term for which was 'neums'. The music, like the overall liturgy, comprised a kind of assembly kit, not dissimilar to a Lego set. We might also compare this way of composing music with how the gloriously illuminated windows were partly constructed from small shapes of coloured glass, and how even the cathedral itself was built partly from fairly standard shapes of stone in repeated variations. Indeed, any manuscript text in a monastic library or scriptorium could be copied, edited, reorganised, reassembled, redistributed, included in different overall manuscripts consisting of several disparate items, and so on.

This overall mode of composition and distribution shares some features with
the production and format of a compact disc, especially if tracks are 'ripped' to a hard drive and available in flexible play-lists. One might think it would be possible to design a kind of Open Source Cantor Program so that the resources of the Internet could be variously assembled in order to constitute from existing databases the particular combination required or preferred for any specific liturgical feast-day throughout the year.

There is however a certain asymmetry in the present digital resources. Several websites offer libraries of antiphons and responsories and other musical components of the mediaeval office, meticulously designated and listed according to the Latin initial phrases or incipits by which they are identified, and in some circumstances it is possible to locate and link to the relevant manuscripts and even to download images of surviving copies. There are also several different digital databases of the basic biblical and patristic texts which provided the primary contexts in the liturgical office for the musical components. But there is a considerable lack of fit between the two resources, musical compositions and texts, since the far more developed musical databases rarely offer any direct connection to the specific accompanying texts in relation to which the music was sung. That is partly a matter of the research resources and grants which are available to musicologists and even liturgicologists but also indicates a predominant orientation towards a 'history of music' model so that comparing numerous

versions of the 'same' antiphon or responsory is far easier than finding or even indexing the texts of the lessons associated with that music.

Open source software may be a more appropriate model than the collected works of a modern composer or the programme for a concert, but the question remains as to why the monks implemented this complex arrangement and invested so much time in it. My remarks so far are only a kind of overture and I still want to explore a number of variations, developments, and interrelated motifs, including some new questions, such as what it meant to say that Benedict of Peterborough wrote both the texts and the music. But so far any answers to my two opening question, what and why, still seem elusive.

collaudare

Consider one incident, recounted by Denis Stevens, which allegedly occurred on the day of Becket's first burial:

> At his obsequies, the monks of Canterbury began to sing the introit *Requiem aeternam*, but a choir of angels countered with *Laetabitur justus*, which is one of several introits used in the Sarum rite for the Mass of a Martyr.

And for the Introit for the Mass of December 29th (which Slocum does not discuss) is the text:

> Gaudeamus / omnes in Domino diem festum celebrantes sub honore Thomae martyris: de cuius passione gaudent angeli et *collaudent* filium dei.
> Ps. 32: 1. Exsultate justi in Domino: rectos decet *collaudatio*. Gloria &c.

It is the Latin word here used twice, *collaudare*, which I later want especially to explore. First, let us return to the two questions I proposed earlier, and the usual answers.

Probably the most frequent terms used to describe what the liturgies consisted of are: praying, praising, worshipping, meditating. The rationale proposed specifically for singing as the core of the monastic liturgy has been derived partly from phrases found in the Bible itself.

For example, the singing of Psalms was justified by such verses as *Psalm* 94:1-2 '*Venite, exsultemus Domino; jubilemus Deo salutari nostro. Praeoccupemus faciem ejus in confessione, et in psalmis jubilemus ei*'. A translation would be: 'Come, let us exult in the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to God our saviour. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms', though '*psalmis*' could just mean 'songs'. Or *Ps.* 95:2: '*Cantate a domino et benedicite nomini eius/annuntiate de die in diem salutare eius*' ('Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation

from day to day'); *Ps.* 104:2: 'Sing unto Him, sing psalms unto Him' ('*Cantate ei, et psallite ei; narrate omnia mirabilia eius')*; *Ps* 46:7: '*Psallite deo nostro, psallite, psallite regi nostro psallite*', though it may be worth noting that the Greek word ψάλλω underpinning this triply repeated '*psallite*' meant 'strum a harp'.

In the New Testament, *James* 5:13 instructs: 'Is any merry? let him sing psalms' (*'Tristatur aliquis vestrum? aequo animo est? psallat.'*) while *Ephesians* 5:18-20 and *Colossians* 3:16 both encourage speaking to one another in 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs'.

The practice of performing the liturgy through the night was seen as stipulated or justified in the very first Psalm, 'on his law he shall meditate day and night' (*Ps.* 1: 2) while other verses were invoked for the timing of the office: 'I have slept and have taken my rest, and I wake again '(*Ps.* 3: 5) or 'in the morning I will stand before you' (*Ps.* 5: 3). One verse particularly interests me: (*Ps* 137:1) 'In the presence of the angels I will chant psalms to you' ('I*n conspectu angelorum psallam tibi adorabo in templum sanctum tuum*'). And the word I have already highlighted but not yet translated: '*Exsultate justi in Domino: rectos decet collaudatio*' (*Ps.* 32: 1).

Let us take some of the terms mentioned as general prescriptions for what the monks were doing. The most common Latin term for praying, *orare*, was often regarded as if directly associated with *laborare*, 'working', and one traditional account of the monks' liturgical activity treated it as a form of labour on behalf of the society as a whole, based on the notion of different classes or social strata performing different functions, with the warrior or knight class defending the society and the peasant class doing the necessary physical tasks. On that view, chanting monks were at least working a full eight-hour day!

But if the perpetual chanting was a kind of job or the fulfilling of a social function, like a serf ploughing, would it matter whether the monks were personally 'praying'? Or was it an almost impersonal activity, like a priest dutifully saying the right words at Mass, whatever his own personal spiritual state or commitment? Eventually, the ordinary parish clergy were also obliged to recite a reduced version of the daily monastic office and even, like monks, to remain celibate. Though they were presumably not obliged to sing rather than simply read the daily office to themselves alone.

As for the term *cantare*, if 'chanting' the liturgy was almost a form of prayer-wheel operation, it wouldn't be necessary for individual monks to sincerely 'mean' or even understand what they were singing. There were frequent complaints about monks hurrying and gabbling through the Psalms and not singing the words properly. Did some monks treat their choir duties as a version of piece-rate work, to be got through as quickly as possible? One monk when asked what was the most onerous part of his life replied : "the boredom of the endless chanting". Perhaps for him the liturgical office was simply a rote activity, and he responded with inward groaning when having to sing *Gaudeamus* ('let us rejoice') at some god-awful

hour of the night. Though one hopes that listening to his more skilled brethren performing elaborate music might have been at least mildly enjoyable.

Another term sometimes used about the chanting is *meditare*, which implies some intellectual engagement. Yet though novice monks had to memorise all the Psalms within their first six months, it is not clear that they necessarily had fully to understand the Latin, any more than children chanting the Koran today have to understand mediaeval Arabic. Indeed, a lengthy 'instructions for novices' (included in *Monastic Constitutions of Lanfranc,* ed. Knowles, pp. 134-149) doesn't emphasise the need for understanding the liturgical texts or for spiritual fervency in performing them, but concentrates upon the importance of minutely observing the precise particulars and protocol of the required ritual gestures and behaviour, such as 'to have his hands crossed upon his knees and in the sleeves in his frock whenever he is seated' and 'he shall adjust his hood aright upon his head, so that it does not hang down on either side, and everywhere outside the dormitory he shall have his forehead uncovered.' These pages of detailed instructions may strike us as like the training instructions for a bell-boy in a luxury hotel or a dancer in the chorus line of a West End musical, and indicate the extent to which the ritual of the liturgy was punctiliously observed.

In this context, the notion that one could spend eight hours each day 'meditating' upon the words you were singing perhaps stretches credulity. Simply remembering them and repeating them properly and to the right melody with the correct gestures and stance ('during three psalms of the nocturns one brother shall sit and the next one stand…') would surely be enough to keep the attention fixed upon getting the words right rather than explicitly understanding what the words meant or how they might be thought about or 'meditated' upon.

We can come back to some of these points but part of the problem is that we are speculating about what mediaeval monks felt they were doing or how they ordinarily experienced the activity of performing the liturgy. But we don't know what went on in their heads or their emotions. There might be several 'layers' involved. When an individual monk is reading a liturgical text in the choir, is he necessarily understanding it, or 'meaning' it, or perhaps endorsing or even somehow identifying with what it says. Is he thinking about it and making the kind of connections sketched earlier, or being merely distracted by some other thoughts? And when he is singing a text do the same 'layers' obtain, or can he perhaps sing the music without attending much to the words, with further variations upon 'understanding' and 'meaning'. Moreover, is he 'in addition' 'believing' in what the text says, or otherwise? And how might the individual monk's response be shaped by the communal activity of singing together, especially perhaps in relation to the expression or confirmation of an emotional engagement with what is being sung or recited? Should we think of the chanting monk is rather like a

professional but largely disengaged member of the chorus of a long-running and familiar Broadway musical?

These are questions akin to those previously raised in relation to the notion of 'praying', particularly in connection with being paid to do so. And any answers to these questions concerning the attitude or conscious response of the monks must be largely speculative or projected. On the other hand, a purely behavioural description would be simply a version of the 'instructions' for the novice or mere stage directions for 'performing' the more elaborate ceremonial rituals of the liturgy. Which seems hardly satisfactory.

Is it however possible to suggest a peculiar kind of 'objective' framework in answer to the questions of 'what' and 'why', a context which makes sense of both the endless chanting and the almost obsessive concern with the exact performance of the ritual?

collaborare

The term mentioned earlier which I now want to consider is ambiguous. The verb *collaudare* is used quite frequently in the liturgical texts, and is especially notable in many of the hymns listed in the *Analecta hymnica,* though it occurs only once in the Psalms (*Ps.* 32: 2), as quoted earlier:

> *Exsultate justi in Domino: rectos decet collaudatio.*
> *confitemini domino in cithara; in psalterio decem chordarum psallite illi.*
>
> The just rejoice in the Lord; *collaudatio* is proper for the righteous.
> Praise him with the lyre, sing songs to him with the ten-stringed harp.

Note incidentally that here the underlying sense of 'psalter' is made explicit.

The verb *colaudare* or *collaudare* can be used simply as an intensive version of *laudare*, to praise fervently or enthusiastically, but also suggests, as with other instances of the co- suffix, a further sense of praising together, as in 'collaborate', or perhaps even co-lab-orare, of doing something jointly, working together to fulfil a task. Which could simply refer to the monastic forms of responsory and antiphonal singing where a solo singer introduces a musical phrase which the chorus takes up and repeats, or alternate verses of the Psalms were chanted in turn by the two rows of monks arranged in facing choir-stalls, a practice which shaped the basic design of the choir and is retained even today.

However, there was also a sense of a different form of collaboration, of praying and praising together, of being *colaudentes*. There is a similar word *congaudere* which occurs in, for example, a much-imitated sequence *Congaudent angelorun chori* composed by Notker, the ninth-century monk of Saint Gall. But let me stick to *collaudare.* Recall that the Introit of the Becket Office begins:

Gaudeamus / omnes in domino diem festum celebrantes sub honore Thomae martyris: de cuius passione gaudent angeli et colaudent filium dei.

The Office opens with the invitation *Gaudeamus*, 'let us sing with joy', which 'we' are already doing but we are then reminded that angels too are joining us in this celebratory song, since they are envisaged as also singing to receive Saint Thomas into heaven on his feast-day. The solo cantor would sing the opening word *Gaudeamus* and the whole choir would join in on *omnes*, 'all'. And then there is the first verse of Psalm 32: '*Exsultate justi in Domino: rectos decet collaudatio*'. The use of the verb '*collaudare*' in this context implies in effect that the choir of angels are joining us in greeting Thomas into heaven.

Remember the liner note on the *Vespers* CD: 'the short serene antiphon *Chorus angelorum* calls upon the hosts of heaven to welcome Thomas and lead him to Paradise'. The phrase '*deducant te angeli'* is now a familiar part of any lay person's funeral rite, not specific to a monk's obsequies: the 'chorus of angels' will lead or induct the newly deceased into the heavens. However, it was an early belief that martyrs, unlike most others, passed immediately into heaven and were thereby given a privileged welcome by the angels whom they were about to join. One legend about Becket, as cited earlier from Denis Stevens, recounts the angels substituting the martyr-specific introit *Laetabitur justus* for the standard funeral *Requiem aeternam*:

> At his obsequies, the monks of Canterbury began to sing the introit *Requiem aeternam*, but a choir of angels countered with *Laetabitur justus*, [let the just man rejoice] which is one of several introits used in the Sarum rite for the Mass of a Martyr.

This suggests that the intervention of the angels is based upon their knowing not only the more appropriate text and melody but that they are familiar with the overall organisation of the liturgical office. Another passage cited by Stevens concerns the night before the martyrdom itself, when again the angels appear to have an appropriate knowledge of the liturgical repertoire:

> In the biography written by Herbert of Bosham and the Icelandic *Thomas Saga Erkibyskups*: 'One of the clerks heareth in sleep, anigh to midnight, a clear-sounding voice chant these two verses up in the air - *Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo venantium; laqueus contritus est, et nos liberati sumus*. Which is, being interpreted: 'Our life is freed from the snare of the fowler even as a sparrow; the snare is broken and we are free.' The Saga, which is the only source to explain this dream, states that although the snare of death was already set up for Thomas, he saved himself by flight. But there was more to the dream than this, for

> what the clerk heard was an ironic, even dramatic, liturgical zeugma: the chant in question must have been either the gradual or the offertory for Holy Innocents (December 28th) and the eve of the [later] principal feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury, or for one of the Masses for Several Martyrs.

This instance again clearly implies that the heavenly choir is familiar with the details of the monastic office and have anticipated the later establishment of Thomas' feast-day as a martyr. Recall too the legend of a dove sitting on Pope Gregory's shoulder which supposedly dictated the entire traditional corpus of Gregorian chant to him. What was conveyed to Gregory was, it seems, the entire repertoire as already sung in heaven by the *chorus angelorum*.

non angli sed angeli

Angels had a particular resonance in England since Augustine's conversion mission in 597 had been allegedly prompted by Gregory's pun concerning English boy captives in Rome: '*non Angli sed Angeli*' ('not English but Angels'), as recounted in Bede (Bk 2, ch. 1) and sung in the Office for Saint Gregory :

> As he beheld, by chance, the children of the Angli (*anglorum pueros*), the blessed man spoke: 'the faces of the Angli do indeed shine brightly, like angels (*ut angeli*). They must be shown the eternal way to salvation. For the kingdom belongs to the Lord and he shall himself reign over the nation'.

Pope Gregory was in any case regarded as an authority on angels since in his extensive commentary on *Job*, the widely read *Magna Moralia*, and in his exposition of *Ezekiel* he brought together, summarised, and made vivid many of the existing folklore stories and superstitions about angels and demons (see F. Homes Dudden, *Gregory the Great*, 1905, II, pp. 358 – 369).

A firm association between angels and music was particularly prominent in the miracles attributed to Saint Dunstan, the most revered Archbishop of Canterbury (959-988) between Augustine and Lanfranc, and a major proponent of extensive monastic reform in England.

Let me indulge a mild detour on miracle stories. We can again quote from a liturgical office, that for Dunstan's own feast-day. The Sequence *Hodierna resonent gaudia* recounts a miscellany of miracles:

> Let our rejoicing this day celebrate the famous works attributed to the miraculous powers of the blessed Dunstan (*Hodierna resonent gaudia virtutum preclara opera beato Dunstano collata*). . . . Before he was born he re-lit a lamp that had gone out. With a wand he routed hordes of evil

> spirits. He surpassed the finest works of the temple and, escorted by angels, entered a closed church. . . He heard the celestial spirits chanting and offering prayers (*supernos psallentes spiritus*) to the Creator: 'Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy'. With them he now joins his own praises (*cumquis sua iam miscet cantica*). Dunstan, ever-living, pray for your servants who in their praise of you sound forth their pious songs of joy (*qui te collaudantes*) and, we beseech you, pray for the universal church of Christ spread throughout the world.

One of these incidents is the focus for a Responsory in the Office :

> Archbishop Dunstan had been overcome by saintly sleep and was being soothed by the music of the angels (*angelicis mulcebatur organis*) and by these words: 'Lord, have mercy. Alleluia.' They sang (*psallebant*) of the holy spirit upon high and in their clear tones offered prayers to the Holy Trinity. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Alleluia.

This incident was later given a particular importance as, supposedly, the first instance of what came to be known as a musical 'trope', the insertion into an existing chant of supplementary verses or additional text and music, as dictated in this instance by the angels overheard by Dunstan and then transcribed by him for later liturgical use. This angelically expanded text and music was preserved and performed in later centuries as 'Dunstans Kyrie'. The general practice of 'troping' was later to be extensively followed and imitated. Noticeably, in addition to the standard triple repeat of *Kyrie* and *Christe* the Dunstan version makes reference to the angelic orders and introduces a fourth address and epithet, incorporating the Virgin Mary into the ancient Trinitarian formula.

Eadmer's *Life* of Dunstan includes various other miracles in which there is an interface between the terrestrial and the angelic worlds. Such encounters with angels provided an intermediary zone, an area for *collaudentes*, and in some cases it is implied that the structure of the angelic musical services shares the form of the earthly liturgy.

> He often used to pleasantly divert not only himself but also the minds of many from the turbulent business of the world by playing musical instruments, in the science of which he was very skilled; he used to move them to meditation of celestial harmony (*meditationem caelestis armoniae*) as much by the sweetness of the words (*suavitatum verborum*) . . interwoven in the musical measures as by the harmonious music he produced through them. (ch. 7)

> One day while he was deep in sweet contemplation (*contemplationis dulcedine positus*) he was suddenly taken up in rapture out of himself and saw the souls of his mother and father rejoicing among the chorus of angels (*chorus angelorum*) in the heavenly kingdom. (ch. 15)

The most popular Dunstan story was:

> He was asked by a certain matron . . possessed by a desire to please God, that he come to her house and design a prayer-stole (*orarium*) for her with his craftsman's skill which he could copy in gold and thread . . Dunstan had begun this work and his harp which he by chance had brought with him . . was hanging next to him against the wall. And all on its own, untouched by human hand, the harp began to play aloud this antiphon, recognisable from its notes: 'The souls of the Saints rejoice in heaven (*Gaudent in caelis animae sanctorum* . .) who have followed in the footsteps of Christ and since they have shed their blood for love of him, thus they will rejoice with Christ for ever'. . . And while the rest were caught up with listening to the simple sound of the strings, Dunstan alone understood what the music foreshadowed and warned of. For he knew by what was being played on the harp (*citharizabatur*) that if he was to 'rejoice with Christ for ever' he should not be afraid to shed his blood on Christ's behalf and his soul would not obtain joy in heaven if he did not follow in Christ's footsteps. He accepted that the harp's performance was truly brought about by the music of angels (*citharedum istum vere angelico modulamine administratum*) so that he might be taught as if from the actual presence of God what ought to be done by him in the future. (ch. 8)

Again the angelic harp plays a significantly appropriate liturgical text. In another miracle story Dunstan is explicitly invited to learn some specifically angelic music:

> On a certain night when he had given his limbs to rest he was swept up to heaven in a vision. . . A young man clad in most brilliant raiment approached him and said to him: 'Since you can hear and see these choruses of people making merry and rejoicing, why do you not join in with them (*cur te illlis non copulas*)? Why do you not mix your praises with theirs (*commisces laudes tuas*)?' . . On hearing these words he said that he did not know what he ought to sing in praise of such a great king. Therefore the young man asked whether he would like to be taught by him what he might fittingly sing. And when Dunstan declared that this would be most acceptable to him, he taught him this antiphon: 'O king of nations, ruler of all things, Christ the King, through the throne of your Majesty bestow indulgence for our sins upon us' . . When he awoke from that dream, however, he arose lamenting because he found

himself so suddenly amidst the tribulations of this world after experiencing such a great joy. He ordered the antiphon to be written down immediately, lest it be forgotten, and afterwards he made his people sing it frequently before him. (ch. 51)

It may be worth noting that in some later usage as a technical musical term 'copula' could indicate a cross-over between two lines of music .

Perhaps the most interesting singing angel miracle concerns the feast of the Ascension:

> . . . Dunstan having finished the night office was alone in the church of Our Saviour at Canterbury and was fixed in total concentration on Christ as he reflected upon such a joyous event. While he was doing this he looked up and, behold, a countless multitude of men in white, wearing golden crowns upon their heads and gleaming with unimaginable brightness, burst in through the doors of the church and stood gathered together in a group all around Dunstan and with one voice they rendered words of greeting to him in this way: 'Greetings, beloved Dunstan, greetings. The Son of God whom you piously desire, orders, if you are prepared, that you should come with us and celebrate this day, whose joys you yearn for with undivided love, thankfully and joyously in his court'. Dunstan was not at all disturbed by their faces and voices, and asked who they might be. 'We are the Cherubim and Seraphim, they said, and we would like to know how you wish to respond to these things.' [Dunstan declined on grounds of pressing pastoral duties]. They replied: 'Well then, ensure that on the sabbath you are ready to travel with us from here to Rome and to sing before the supreme Pontiff "Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus," for ever (aeternaliter canere)'. He agreed with what they had proposed and they dissolved and disappeared from his sight'. (ch. 63)

I have considered several Dunstan stories at some length partly because the late tenth century was when the English monasteries, including those in Canterbury, were reformed under the leadership of Dunstan and Bishop Aethelwold in a specifically Benedictine direction, but also to emphasise by the number of incidents in this one saint's *Life* that encounters with singing angels were regarded as not at all unusual in the lives of late mediaeval saints.

It was probably Bishop Aethelwold, the co-reformer with Dunstan of the English monastic communities, who commissioned the 'Abingdon' copy of the *Rule of St Benedict* around 950 (*CCCC MS 57*), though Canterbury had another manuscript version at about the same time (*Cotton Tiberius A. III*). The *Rule* has its own significant references to angels, especially in Chapter 7, on Humility:

> Brothers, if we wish to arrive at the highest point of humility, and speedily reach that heavenly exaltation to which we can only ascend by the humility of this present life, we must by our ever-ascending actions erect a ladder like the one Jacob beheld in his dream, by which the angels appeared to him descending and ascending [*Gen.* 28:12]. Without doubt this descent and ascent can signify nothing else than that we descend by [self-] exaltation and ascend by humility. And the ladder thus erected is our life in the world, which, if the heart is humbled, is lifted up by the Lord to heaven . . Keeping custody over himself at every hour from sin and vice of thought, tongue, eyes, hands, feet, of his own will or of fleshly desires, let a man consider that he is regarded from heaven by God at every hour, and that his actions in every place are perceived in the Divine Vision and are reported to God by His angels at every hour . . and if the angels assigned to us report to the Lord every day, both by day and night, concerning the works we accomplish, then we must be on our guard at every hour, brothers, lest . . He should say to us in the future: This you did and I was silent' [*Ps.* 49:21].

It is the angels who collaborate, almost as works supervisors or perhaps time and motion inspectors, in the unending labour of the monks, the *opus dei*. In Chapter 19, 'On The Discipline Of Chanting Psalms':

> Let us always remember what the prophet says: 'Serve the Lord in fear' [*Ps.* 2:11], and again, 'Chant psalms wisely' [*Ps.* 46:8]; and 'In the presence of the angels I will chant psalms to you' [*Ps.* 137:1]. Therefore let us consider how we ought to behave in the presence of the Holy One and His angels, and thus stand to chant psalms in such a way that our mind and voice are in concord with each other.

A Canterbury monk who consulted the lavish 12th century manuscript of the psalms now known as the *Canterbury Psalter* would have found multiple angels depicted in the complex half-page illustrations which accompany each Psalm, with angels quite frequently shown playing musical instruments, though trumpets rather than harps. The elaborate illustrations indicate that the heavenly angels would undoubtedly have been singing hymns, according to *Revelations* 4:8 and *Isaiah* 6.3, a verse which was incorporated into the great *Te Deum* hymn. Though it would be difficult to illustrate the perfumes which, according to *Revelations* 5: 8, are the prayers of the Saints who sang a new song.

It's a familiar motif or cliché that little children are close to heaven and almost, sometimes, 'angelic'. A celibate monk could perhaps see himself as still an angelic child in the light of the often quoted passage in Luke (20:34-36):

> And Jesus answering said to them, 'The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but those who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal to the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection'.

Both *Psalm* 8:3, 'Ex ore infantium et lactentium perfecisti laudem' ('out of the mouths of infants and sucklings have you perfected praise') and *Matthew* 19: 14 ('let little children come unto me . . for to such belongs the kingdom') were cited to justify having actual boy choristers singing in monasteries. The terms '*angeli dei*' and '*pueri angeli*' were used in a Notre Dame cathedral instruction book around 1200 for the boy singers in the choir (see Craig Wright, *Music and Ceremony at Notre Dame of Paris 500-1550*, 1989, chapter 5). The papal court was later to have its own male *castrati*. Which is another story.

The notion that the liturgy was shared with the *chorus angelorum* and sometimes dictated by angels is still retained in even a fairly modern editions of the *Liber Usualis* itself, in a statement approved by an official *imprimatur* (1950, p. xiv):

> The above rules have been drawn from the holy Fathers, some of whom learned this way of singing from the Angels, while others received it from the teaching of the Holy Spirit speaking to their hearts in contemplation.

supplementum ruinas angelicas

The liturgical use of the term 'co-laudare' implies not only that the monks chanted 'in the presence of the angels' but that they were actually chanting *with* the angels. This notion can be historically or theologically located in two contexts, both now somewhat unfamiliar. Indeed, pursuing this motif takes us back to the very earliest stages in the differentiation of the new 'Christians' from the Jewish community.

For example, the passage from *Luke* 20:34 quoted earlier with its reference to 'children of the resurrection' as 'equal to angels' can be situated in a complex problematic, a coming to terms with the basic claim by early 'Christians' concerning the resurrection of Jesus the Christ and the possibility of our own similar resurrection. This involved both the emergence of a notion of a 'second' coming, partly as a displacement of the claim that the Messiah had already come (but had been killed) and of a growing belief that his promised kingdom might be a spiritual reign in the heavens rather than a once-expected arrival of him on earth (which had also nevertheless somehow already arrived).

A messianic hope or expectation, within some Jewish factions, of a national liberation and a reclaiming of the city of Jerusalem from Roman imperial occupation, was arguably transmuted by one emerging splinter group into a potentially global future salvation in the heavenly city of God.

From this compressed period of entangled readjustments in beliefs and practices, which eventually involved the decidedly non-Jewish notions of divine incarnation and of a somehow corporeal after-life, let me single out one now almost forgotten or discarded component. Which partly provides an answer to one of my questions.

By the fourth century, the great Saint Augustine in particular had managed to rationalise and even synthesise some strands in the relations between the older Jewish and the more recently emergent Christian beliefs. To interpret Jesus as the Christ-Messiah who had died, been rejected, and even killed by the very chosen people themselves, had eventually involved proposing a novel interpretation of the divine intention which explained that death, which in turn had involved a reinterpretation of events recounted in *Genesis*.

In an argument partly derived from apocalyptic and Pauline texts, and later to be more cogently argued by Anselm, Augustine gave a new prominence and focus to an element in *Genesis* and Jewish tradition. The 'Fall' or expulsion from Eden was to be partly attributed not to a folk-tale snake in a crafty tempter's role but to a malevolent figure of satanic guile, specifically an ex-archangel whose own obscure motivation for a primordial rebellion at least deflected or distracted from the theological conundrum of the origin of earthly evil. It was a fallen angel who was responsible for the otherwise inexplicable human fall.

But once the death-inducing disobedience in Eden had been situated in this cosmic framework, the paradoxical death of the human-divine Jesus could act as a form of counter-weight, even implementing the payment ('redemption') of a ransom, a buying-back of humanity from this formidable but finally defeated ex-archangel foe. Yet this entire speculative narrative left some large holes in the scaffolding of the theological fabric. As always, ancillary theories and adjustments were required.

According to what became known as the 'great replacement' theory, or *supplementum ruinas angelicas*, it was argued that since the original total number of angels must have been in accordance with a perfect divine choice and calculation, the number of angels who 'fell' must at some point be once again exactly matched by the number of their eventual replacements in heaven, so that the original perfect and proper heavenly number was restored. This is of course no longer a view regarded as central to modern Christian belief and some may find it odd that it ever was.

Here is part of Augustine's version of this idea:

> While some of the angels deserted God in impious pride and were cast into the lowest darkness from the brightness of their heavenly home,

the remaining number of the angels persevered in eternal bliss and holiness with God. For these faithful angels were not descended from a single angel, lapsed and damned. Hence, the original evil did not bind them in the fetters of inherited guilt, nor did it hand the whole company over to a deserved punishment, as is the human lot. Instead, when he who became the devil first rose in rebellion with his impious company and was then with them prostrated, the rest of the angels stood fast in pious obedience to the Lord and so received what the others had not had: a sure knowledge of their everlasting security in his unfailing steadfastness.

Thus it pleased God, Creator and Governor of the universe, that since the whole multitude of the angels had not perished in this desertion of him, those who had perished would remain forever in perdition, but those who had remained loyal through the revolt should go on rejoicing in the certain knowledge of the bliss forever theirs. From the other part of the rational creation – that is, mankind – although it had perished as a whole through sins and punishments, both original and personal, God had determined that a portion of it would be restored and would fill up the loss which that diabolical disaster had caused in the angelic society. For this is the promise to the saints at the resurrection, that they shall be equal to the angels of God.

Thus the heavenly Jerusalem, our mother and the commonwealth of God, shall not be defrauded of her full quota of citizens, but perhaps will rule over an even larger number. We know neither the number of holy men nor of the filthy demons, whose places are to be filled by the sons of the holy mother, who seemed barren in the earth, but whose sons will abide time without end in the peace the demons lost. But the number of those citizens, whether those who now belong or those who will in the future, is known to the mind of the Maker, 'who calleth into existence things which are not, as though they were', and 'ordereth all things in measure and number and weight'.

(Augustine, *Enchiridion*, trans. Albert C. Outler, 1955, chapter IX, 28-30).

What can be recognised here is one premise for a notion of predestination which limits salvation to a restricted selection of the 'chosen', though in this passage Augustine partly sidesteps that somewhat unwelcome implication. However, Saint Augustine's major work *City of God* is centred upon Book X in which Augustine presents the ritual practices of the angelic chorus as fundamentally constitutive of the city of God. Their core activity is singing the praises of God. The fate of some humans, but not all, is therefore to join them in the *chorus angelorum*.

Figuring out the 'proper' number of 'replacements' for fallen angels was itself tricky, with much dispute over *Revelation* 5: 11:

> And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

Eventually the preferred number was traditionally settled as 144,000. But who was to be chosen to make up that number?

Partly following Augustine, several centuries later, Anselm of Canterbury discussed the same issues, as indicated by the chapter headings in his *Cur deus homo*: 'The reason why the number of angels who fell must be made up from men' (chapter XVI); 'How other angels cannot take the place of those who fell' (XVII); 'Whether there will be more holy men than evil angels' (XVIII). Given Anselm's own argument as to 'why God became man' it was logical that if there had been no fallen angels there would have been no Satanic explanation of the human fall, while if there are no replacements for the fallen angels God's Heaven remains under-populated. However, St. Anselm was cautiously clear on one tricky problem:

> Moreover, there will be more elect than sinful angels, and thus we shall say that human beings were not created solely for the restoration of the number which has been depleted, but also to make up a number which was not yet complete.

It may be a small surprise that the *Book of Common Prayer* long retained in the burial service an implicit reference to this otherwise somewhat neglected doctrine. Immediately after the *Our Father* and just before the collect there is a short prayer (my emphasis):

> We give thee hearty thanks for that it has pleased thee to deliver this [brother] out of the miseries of this sinful world : beseeching thee that it may please thee, of thy gracious goodness, *shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect* , and to hasten thy kingdom .

This prayer was in the *Second Prayer Book* of 1552, though not in the 1549. It is still in my battered 20th-century *Common Prayer* at page 194.

The notion of the *supplementum ruinas angelicas* suggests one answer to my questions concerning what the monks were doing and why. They were basically, one can claim, trainee angels, apprentices. The monastic way of life was an extended rehearsal, a continuous practising for joining in the eternal worship of angels, with monks as apprentices learning how to sing not just for eight hours a day, 365 days a year, but for ever and ever. Singing was destined to fill not just each earthly day but all time, infinitely and eternally.

Moreover, in so far as 'Gregorian chant' was a kind of Lego kit of endlessly reconfigurable combinations of musical neums, phrases, anthems, melismas, tropes, responsories, and so on, with the built-in possibility of poly-texts and composite poly-phony with no finite limits, then an infinite musical activity was angelically possible. Not just a *Spem in alium* for a mere forty voices, or an annually recurring liturgical year, but an a-temporal and perhaps even spontaneously improvised collective composition truly for the end of time.

Early 'monks', so they originally hoped, were thus especially more qualified than the rest of us to contribute to this angelic co-lab-oratory not only by having practised the monastic virtues of humility, obedience, and poverty, and even choosing to become eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom, but because, after having long practised as junior *collaudantes*, they were more readily able to take their trained places in or alongside the heavenly *chorus angelorum* itself and contribute to the main function of angels, the celebration of an unending liturgy of praise.

However, as to why and how heaven itself should have come to consist of such endless chanting and playing of music, there are perhaps still awkward questions, and particularly about 'collab-oration'. For example, how does one keep musical time in an a-temporal aeviternity? How can a monastic Cantor's selection of this day's music down in the earthly present so perfectly coincide with that of the heavenly choir up aloft, except by some kind of literally pre-established harmony? And, as complex polyphony developed, how many angels and monks could sing the same melodic lines in consonance? In any case, how do body-less spirits sing at all? Can you play a harp with a wing? Or blow a trumpet, however apocalyptically? Incidentally, was Thomas Becket predestined to play the *tuba* in heaven? And can we even make sense of there being angels anyway, however many folk tales and saints' miracles we can cite?

Dante

As might be expected, Thomas Aquinas wrote what was in effect a comprehensive treatise on angels (see *Summa Theologia*e I, 108 .8 ff and III 163 .2 ff). Among other conclusions (see below) he argued that angels when communicating with each other in heaven couldn't and didn't speak or sing after all. Nevertheless Dante, despite his considerable debt to Aquinas, felt it appropriate to include the performance of singing in both Purgatory and Paradise. Dante had presumably thought hard about the presence of music in the strange after-world of the *Commedia.* So, as a relaxing musical interlude, we can sample an article by Barbara Smythe, for the Dominican journal *Blackfria*rs in November, 1925, 'Music in the Divine Comedy' (English quotations inserted):

Purgatorio and *Paradiso* are both full of music, but it must be noted that only singing and dancing are directly introduced. Instruments are only mentioned in illustrations and metaphors. The delightful angels of mediaeval painters and sculptors, with their viols and psalteries and trumpets, find no place in Dante's Paradise. . . The condition of the blessed is made to seem so much more a state than a place that so material an attribute as an instrument in the hands of either a saint or an angel might seem incongruous.

Moreover, Dante was accustomed, on earth, to hearing the praises of God sung in choruses, either in unison or polyphonic, and so he heard the same praises, sung in the same way, in Paradise, save that the singing there was of ['A harmony and sweetness that cannot be known except there where joy is everlasting'] (*Par.* X, 147-8).

The holy souls in Purgatory and the blessed souls in Heaven give utterance to their prayers and their praises alike in song, sometimes in chorus, sometimes singly, while the choruses are sometimes in unison and sometimes in many parts. But there is one fundamental difference between the music of Purgatory and the music of Paradise. Whereas the former is essentially human, the latter is superhuman. The blessed sing words and music that were familiar to Dante, *Osanna, Regina caeli, Giona Patri,* etc., but the manner of their singing is hardly describable.

In Purgatory, on the contrary, the singing is never beyond human comprehension. When we read Dante's wonderful description of the redeemed souls in the Angel's boat singing *In exitu Israel de Aegypto* as they approach the shores of Purgatory at sunrise (*Purg.* II, 37-48), it is possible not only to picture to ourselves the sight he describes, but to imagine the sound of the beautiful *tonus peregrinu*s, familiar alike to him and to ourselves, coming across the water to the island. Again when in the evening of that day Dante and Virgil enter the valley where the souls of the princes who had neglected their duty on earth are waiting to be admitted into Purgatory, and find them at their night prayers, singing first *Salve Regina* and then the Compline Hymn, we can well imagine the effect.

The opening *terzine* of the Eighth Canto are among the most beautiful in the *Purgatorio*, and entrance us even as Dante himself was entranced by the singing of the leader: ['*Te lucis ante* came from his lips so devoutly with such sweet notes that it rapt me from myself. Then the rest joined him sweetly and devoutly through the whole hymn . .'] (*Purg.* VIII, 13-17).

In Purgatory proper it is the same. In the Terrace of the Wrathful the unity of the singing specially impresses Dante: ['Their openings were always *Agnus Dei,* one word was with them all, and one measure, so that full concord seemed to be among them'] (*Purg.* xvi, 19-21).

. . . Only when Dante is near the 'blessed shore', the further bank of Lethe, does he hear singing so wonderful that he cannot even

remember it ['*Asperges me* sung so sweetly that I cannot remember it, far less write it'] (*Purg.* XXXI, 98-9). This is the beginning of the heavenly music that he is to hear henceforth.

. . . as Dante is borne higher and higher through the heavenly spheres, the music grows less and less intelligible to him. In the lower spheres he tells us distinctly what the spirits sing. Piccarda in the Heaven of the Moon sings *Ave Maria* (*Par.* III, 121-122). Justinian and his companions in the Heaven of Mercury sing a *Hosanna* of praise the words of which are given, and dance to their music (*Par.* VII, 1-7). The souls in the Heaven of Venus, too, sing a *Hosanna* 'such,' says Dante, 'that never since have I been without desire of hearing it again' (*Par.* VIII, 29) but when he passes beyond the shadow of earth the music is such that he cannot carry away the memory with him.

In the Heaven of the Sun, where the spirits of the Doctors were 'sweeter in voice than shining in appearance', though they looked like blazing suns, he tells us that the singing was too beautiful for him to be able to describe it: ['In the court of Heaven, whence I have returned, are many gems so precious and beautiful that they may not be taken out of the kingdom, and among these was the song of those lights.'] (*Par.* X, 70-73). When St. Thomas Aquinas, their spokesman, has named himself and his companions, they again break into song and dance: ['So did I see the glorious wheel move and render voice to voice with harmony and sweetness that cannot be known except there where joy is everlasting.'] (*Par.* X, 145-148).

. . then another dance begins, the garlands this time moving in contrary directions as they sing of the Blessed Trinity and of the Incarnation (*Par.* XIII, 26-7). The former mystery is again the theme of their song after St. Thomas's last discourse: ['That One and Two and Three which ever lives, and ever reigns in Three and Two and One, uncircumscribed, and circumscribing all things, was thrice sung by each of those spirits with such a melody as would be adequate reward for every merit'] (*Par.* XIV, 28-33).

In the Heaven of Mars, where the souls of martyrs and crusaders form a great Cross, Dante hears a few words, but cannot understand the song as a whole (*Par.* XIV, 122-126). In the Heaven of Saturn the sweetness of the music would have been so unbearable for mortal ears that the souls of the contemplatives do not sing at all, though St. Peter Damian dances for sheer delight at the thought of the inscrutable depths of the Divine Will. But when Dante's senses have been purified by a vision of the Triumph of Christ in the Eighth Sphere, he seems to hear and understand the music better - not, as he understands the music of Purgatory, because it is not far removed from earthly music, but because his perceptions have been quickened. He cannot describe it, but he hears the words clearly. . .

> As the songs of the Eighth Sphere are mainly liturgical, we are probably right in imagining that they were sung in unison, to the plainsong melodies associated with them. The *Hosanna* of the Angels in the Ninth Sphere, on the other hand, is polyphonic. . . so that the whole song of the Angels was a chorus in nine parts, or rather a triple chorus, each chorus having three parts – a wonderful symbolic threefold song to the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. . .
>
> The Angels as they sing perpetually revolve round a point of light which symbolises the Unity of God. Thus we find the whole Court of Heaven glorifying the Creator in rhythmic movement and in rhythmic sound.

It would have been reassuring for any monk to read in the *Commedia* that so much of his liturgical chant already constituted the staple repertoire at least of Purgatory, even if, as on earth, some of the more advanced music in Paradise was beyond his comprehension. It may also have intrigued monks who had studied the formidable Aquinas to imagine him if not singing at least dancing.

Dante almost persuades us to ignore awkward metaphysical problems and palpable paradoxes. Particularly, and inescapably, those concerning the very nature of time. Including musical time. And liturgical time.

hodie

We can now introduce a second historical-theological context out of which the monastic office may have at least indirectly emerged. I earlier indicated that the Becket Office and the liturgy in general deploy a curious a-temporality: the invitation for the angels to receive the new martyr into heaven is repeated annually in the liturgical cycle even though the event has already taken place, years, decades, or centuries before. In considering the cathedral nave I commented on the several accounts of the death of Thomas, as posing a familiar problem in writing history since no historical or past event 'now' exists.

Yet the liturgical office suggests otherwise: that the moment of martyrdom and of Becket's saintly transformation is not simply commemorated but somehow re-enacted or re-activated, as an ongoing action on 'this day', *hodie*, today, and is also taking place 'now' in time-less heaven. Becket's death is not a cessation of his time but an entry into a different non-temporality. This claim is decidedly not specific to Becket, and is at the core of much Christian belief, not least the notion that the celebration of the Eucharist itself is an action occurring in both a 'past' and 'present', and simultaneously in many space-time locations at once.

Which returns us to another aspect of the question of what the monks were 'really' doing, and to the related problem of a *historia* which isn't

'history' but occurring 'now'. The opening line of one antiphonal Sequence for the Becket Office is:

> *Solemne canticum hodie resonet in terra.*
> Let a solemn Canticle today resound on earth.

The word *hodie* operates as a bridge or coordination between the terrestrial and the heavenly. The liturgical celebration is occurring on 'this day' (*hac dies*) but this is not the day of the calendar or secular 'succession' and not even a 'day' as in the notional unit of purgatorial indulgences. What is involved is a different temporality, a non-terrestrial time into which martyrs in particular are exceptionally inserted 'immediately' in terms of earthly time, which was partly why martyrs had their own liturgical feasts from the earliest period of Christianity.

The best-known 'day' when angels tell us what they themselves sing and what we should correspondingly sing is 'Christmas Day' with the appearance to the shepherds and a special guest performance of 'Gloria' in the sky. The *Gloria* in the liturgy is an elaboration of the angels' song to the shepherds, and an explicit connection between angels and music is an inevitable motif for festive concerts at Christmas time. The Sixteen choral group programme for December 2010 was entitled 'The Angel Gabriel' and Canterbury Cathedral's declared music theme for the Christmas period in 2023 focused on 'Angels Songs'. As Christmas approaches we may take it for granted that angels can indeed sing, as we repeatedly listen to 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing'. Despite Pope Benedict in his homily on Christmas in 2010 cautioning that they perhaps only spoke, but in an angelic way of speaking**.**

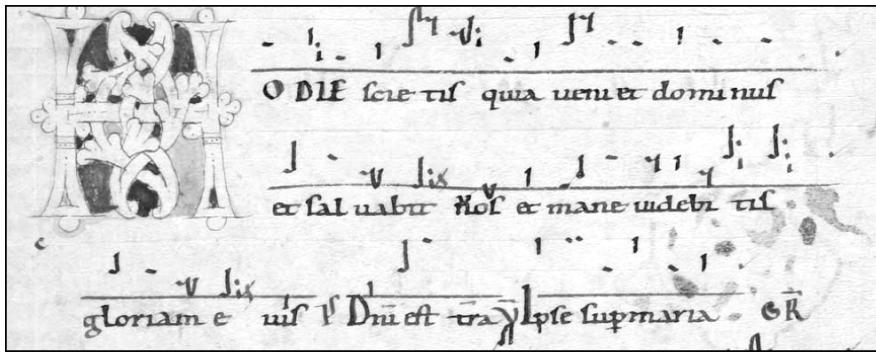
However, if we ask 'when' is 'Christmas Day' we approach issues which go to the core of Christian belief. Not simply because different Christian sects and traditions celebrate the feast according to various calendars but crucially because the feast itself is dedicated to the Incarnation as the crucial moment of intersection between human time and the divine.

We can conveniently consider part of the Christmas liturgical office as presented and arranged on an unusually well organised CD, entitled *Chant de l'Eglise de Rome* (VIe - XIIIe Siècles) by Ensemble Organum and Marcel Pérès, a set of recordings which tried to evoke the specifically Roman liturgy between 600 and 900 CE. Access to this or any similar CD is of course not necessary but perhaps helpful, while bearing in mind the warning on this CD's liner note:

> These recordings are not of course to be taken as undoubtedly the exact way in which such liturgical offices were sung in Rome during this early period, but it can be claimed that the Ensemble Organum have tried faithfully to respond to the evidence available for us. There

are only five manuscripts of the old Roman chant extant. This recording is based upon the oldest of these dating from 1071.

One such manuscript is now in the public domain and images of it can be found online, at www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/fmb/cb-0074/8r/large.



Here is the CD liner comment on the liturgy of Christmas Day:

> The mystery of the Incarnation of the Word lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It is celebrated just after the longest night of the year, when (in the northern hemisphere) the days begin to lengthen until we reach the summer solstice, which is associated with the figure of John the Baptist. To celebrate this moment, the Church deploys an exceptional – virtually uninterrupted – liturgical cycle in which the usual Offices are interspersed with four Masses.
>
> The First Mass begins just after the ninth hour, that is to say when the sun is midway between its zenith and twilight. Then, amid the final glimmers of daylight, First Vespers of the Nativity are sung. When darkness has fallen, Compline celebrates the first hour of night. After a short pause begins the great Office of Matins, whose solemn ceremonial lasts more than three hours, until the night reaches its epicentre; at this point Midnight Mass is celebrated.
>
> As the time of darkness draws to an end, an hour before the first gleams of dawn, begins the Office of Lauds, the two last chants of which – the hymn and the Gospel canticle – must correspond with the arrival of light in the sanctuary. Then the Office of Prime, which lasts only some twenty minutes, introduces the Dawn Mass. A short break, and, when the sun is midway between the horizon and its zenith – that is, at the third hour – the Office of Terce introduces the Fourth Mass. Between the commencement of the cycle – after the ninth hour on 24th December – and the beginning of the last Mass – after the third hour on 25th December - six hours of daylight and twelve hours of night have elapsed. This geometry of time, which leaves our

contemporaries indifferent, constituted for our forefathers the foundation of the liturgical act.

The emphasis here on the timings of the liturgical events can remind us that not only is the liturgical ceremony itself not reproduced by simply listening to a recording but also that the calendar, the time of the year, is not normally crucial to a modern listening experience of music. It would be unusual to find oneself (unless deliberately, as on the occasion of Christmas) matching up listening to musical pieces with the calendar dates relevant to their composition. One would not normally listen to explicitly Christmas music in July – though there is now a UK year-round television channel entirely devoted to films focused on Christmas. So, with some incidental comments on how the music is performed we can sample the contents of this CD.

The first track is the Introit for the Mass of the Vigil of Christmas which has the text:

Hodie scietis quia veniet dominus et salvabit nos: et mane videbitis gloriam eius. . .

This can be translated as:

Today you will know that the Lord will come and save us; and in the morning you shall see his glory.
Verse: The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof: the world, and all they that dwell therein.
Glory be to the Father and the Son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.

On this recording a solo Cantor sings the opening word *Hodie,* meaning *today*, and the melody he initiates is then taken up by the full male choir. The verse is then sung by a solo tenor while the choir as a whole provides a continuous drone beneath the plangent melody of the solo. The *Hodie* line is then repeated by the full chorus, more or less recapitulating the melody of the first rendering though with an added drone continued from the verse. The usual *Gloria Patri,* the 'doxology', is sung solo in a voice that reaches higher than any previous in the piece and with a more extended elaboration on the words *semper* and *saecula*, while the rest of the choir provide a continuing bass drone. We are now nearly four minutes into the singing. And for a third time the *Hodie* line is sung by the full choir, again repeating variations on the modulations and syllabic elaborations we have already heard twice.

The continued repetition of *Hodie*/today**,** emphasising this very particular day, Christmas Day, takes its place within a sequence of other words which are temporarily inflected, and might be glossed as a sequence or convergence: today, now, you will know, in the future, that the Lord will

come and save us, in the future again, but not too distant a future since *manet*, he remains, in the morning, you shall see his glory. And so on.

The next track on this CD gives us the *Gradual* sung during the same Vigil Mass and again the text is *Hodie scietis*. For at least the fourth time we will have heard these words or as members of a choir sung them ourselves. There is an undulating drone while a solo voice elaborates almost every syllable of the *Hodie* passage, so that the rendition of these few words takes over two and a half minutes. And as listeners or as members of the choir providing the drone we are perhaps being invited to register the significance of this line, that 'today' is the *now* that the Lord will come and save us, the '*nos*' (us) given a particularly extended elaboration of notes. Any such response is focused not so much upon the problematic content of the word *hodie* itself as upon the very fact or awareness of our being here at this moment, *hodie*.

The verse which is then sung, again by a solo singer in a plaintively extended, elaborated way, is different from that in the Introit. In translation:

> Give ear, O thou that rulest Israel: thou that leadest Joseph like a sheep, thou that sitteth upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasses.

Many listeners today would probably have difficulty grasping the phrase about Joseph or recognising its relevance to Christmas Day, and understanding what or who the cherubim are, or what the point is of mentioning Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasses. Again the *Hodie* line is sung, as an extended solo over a modulating drone. This rendition takes nearly three minutes so this short composition has taken over seven minutes. It is again a small indication of the length of time the whole liturgical office would take. I want to come back later to the issue of temporality, and some aspects of the relationship not only between the text and music but between the texts themselves. But first let us comment on a few more tracks as we would probably listen to them.

Track 3 is the Introit of the Midnight Mass. But note that the liturgical Mass of the Vigil on the preceding tracks would in real time have occurred several hours earlier and several readings and other music would have happened in the 'real time' between these tracks immediately juxtaposed on the CD. The text for the midnight Mass is:

> *Dominus dixit ad me, filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te.*
> *Quare fremuerunt gentes et populi meditati sunt inania?*
> *Gloria patri...*

A translation would be:

> The Lord said unto me: thou art my son, this day I have begotten thee. Why have the nations raged, and the people devised vain things? Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.

I have again repeated the doxology, partly to emphasise that this ancient formulation is indeed repeated again and again and again throughout the entire liturgy, and that its meaning has to do not with temporal sequence but with a perpetuity or simultaneity of times which is to be encountered only in the realm of the divine. In this Introit, moreover, the doxology, so deeply familiar that we sometimes forget what it literally says, here resonates with and highlights the peculiar relationship between times and tenses in the phrase 'this day I have begotten thee' since the 'begetting' is itself eternal or a-temporal despite the very meaning of the term 'beget'. In addition, the angelic *gloria* which we will soon recognise in the coming morning of Christmas is also the *gloria* which in the doxology is attributed to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, in the beginning, and now, *Hodie,* and ever, and the world without end is the world which is the Lord's into which this feast celebrates his coming.

The phrase *ego hodie genui te* is thus triply layered, referring here to Christmas but in the Gospel account the phrase was declared at the baptism of Jesus, a different 'beginning', and originally quoted from Psalm 2 : 7. Moreover, the phrase as divinely spoken is here retained in its first person mode as addressed to the baptised Jesus, but also as sung now is implicitly appropriated by the whole choir (*dixit ad me*). What then strikes us is the shifting pronouns. What the Lord said in the past 'to me' is addressed in the present by the singers to themselves: the Lord now announces to them that they too are the sons of God because today, *hodie*, in celebrating this Christmas day, and seeing the glory of the Lord in the morning to come, they too, and I, you, collectively together, will again ourselves be newly 'begotten' by the Lord.

The phrase *ego hodie genui te* thus encapsulates several theological and temporal aporias. What is the 'day' upon which the father's generation of the son occurs? What is the nature of the intersection between divine tense and earthly history? In what sense can the divine father beget a son? It is part of the point of liturgical chant that one should proclaim these 'mysteries'.

This Introit includes the phrase *populi meditati sunt inania* and it is tempting to gloss the verb *meditare* as indicating or inviting a meditative reflection upon the multiple significances of this brief text. The verse line is sung solo against a drone, with the only syllabic elaboration on the final word *inania*. Again, a modern listener might find this choice of verse somewhat enigmatic, though the lengthening of the final word might be regarded as allowing time for a double question to be 'meditated', that actually asked within the verse itself (why are the *gentes* raging?) and a

secondary question not so much about the meaning of the verse or the intelligibility of the reference as the significance of the words for those singing them. If the *Domine dixit* line clearly applies to these prospective sons of the divine father (ourselves) how are we related to the *gentes* or the *populi* who are 'meditating' (*meditati*) on inane things?

For reasons I will explore later I think this would be to mistake the use of *meditati* here, which is better translated simply as 'devising' or 'plotting'. A monk would have recognised and remembered the Psalm from which the line is taken and I am tempted here to explore the complex role of memory, but for now it can be said that as soon as the opening phrase of the verse in the gradual, *qui regis Israel*, or the phrase which opens this verse *quare fremuerunt*, was heard then not only might the rest of the line be recalled but even the rest of the Psalm. The entire 150 Psalms were sung in the course of each week, so the words which are here included in the introit or the gradual would be deeply familiar from repeated repetition.

After the verse, the *Dominus dixit* line is again repeated, by the whole choir. These are the words which the Lord has said, as are the words of the whole Bible. The words, *hodie genui te*, were spoken at the baptism of Jesus, not on the day of his earthly birth, so the two liturgical feasts are being associated here, that of the baptism and that of Christmas day. One might add that the feast-day of a saint is always a kind of baptism day, or like the day of a novice becoming a fully professed monk, a transition into a new kind of existence and a new temporality, that of the monastic order.

The *Gloria* is then sung solo, allowing the choral drone to echo, match, or follow along, but neither exactly nor in unison. And finally the *Dominus dixit* line is yet again repeated. As indeed it will again be sung later as the verse of the *Alleluia* in the midnight Mass. Which again reminds us of the midnight threshold as a transition between 'days' which the night offices recognised as both natural and liturgically constructed.

The Introit for the Dawn Mass (track 8) is a further example of this complex interface between liturgical time and diurnal time. The text is:

> *Lux fulgebat hodie super nos, quia natus est nobis dominus et vocabitur admirabilis deus, princeps pacis, pater futuri seculi, cuius regni non erit finis.*
>
> A light shall shine upon us this day: for the Lord is born for us: and he shall be called wonderful, God, the prince of peace, the father of the world to come, of whose reign there shall be no end.

That the dawn mass begins with the phrase 'light will shine' is of course no accident. The opening phrase *lux fulgebat* is sung solo by the Cantor and on the word *Hodie* the entire chorus joins in. Again one might comment on the tenses, the temporalities: today the light *will* shine, because on this day *is* born but also *was* born, and he *will* be called, and his future reign *will* in the future not have an end (*finis).*

Finally, we reach the main Mass of Christmas Day itself. The text of the introit is :

> *Puer natus est nobis et filius datus est nobis : cuius imperium super humerum eius et vocabitur nomen eius magni consilii angelus.*

With the accompanying verse:

> *Cantate domino canticum novum quia mirabilia fecit dominus.*

A translation would be:

> A child is born to us, and a son is given to us: whose government is upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called the Angel of great counsel.

The verse is:

> Sing to the Lord a new canticle: because he has done wonderful things.

Most of this is composited from the Psalms, including Psalm 97. The cantor intones *puer natus est* and the whole choir joins in on *nobis*, 'to' or 'for' us. After the opening antiphon the doxology *gloria* is sung and then the *natus est* antiphon is repeated. The verse is itself a comment upon what is being sung: today we are singing a 'new song' (*canticum novum*), though indeed we are singing a very old song, and one which has been repeated many times before, and is to be repeated as the text of the Communion later in the mass, when the whole choir joins in after the opening word *viderunt* on the *omnes,* 'all', and the verse ends *quia mirabilia fecit dominus,* because the Lord has done wonderful things, echoing and contrasting *mirabilia* with the *inania* of those who at the Midnight Mass were 'meditating' upon vain things. I will resist trying to gloss the use of 'angelus' here.

I am not claiming that all these interwoven resonances concerning time would pass through the conscious mind while hearing or singing the word *Hodie*, even if there is a momentary elaboration upon the syllables by the music which might allow some such immediate reflection. Rather, the word *Hodie* itself triggers, includes, or incorporates all these senses or meanings which would have been elaborated upon in other contexts and practices. That is the function of listening to the 'readings' and sermons in the liturgy itself and in studying the Fathers. In other words, years of attending to the contextual richness of the liturgy was essential to its comprehension even in the act of singing it.

I will add that very unusually this CD includes one of the liturgical readings. The long lesson for the main mass of Christmas day is the

opening of the Gospel of St John, *in principio erat verbum*, in the beginning was the word, and this text perhaps more than any other can stimulate and draw upon a sustained meditation upon the theological paradoxes of time, beginnings, and eternity, while also transforming the light which dawned earlier in the divine office into that light which enlightens every man that comes into the world. To listen to the extraordinary declamatory reading or intoning of this prologue by Lycorgos Angelopoulos on this particular recording might well be an acoustic revelation for anyone used to the typically pallid rendering of Gospel readings in today's religious services, but the sixth-century Archbishop of Canterbury, the Greek Theodore of Tarsus, might well have recognised these dramatically rendered tones.

holiday

So, on this CDat least, we have reached Christmas Day. This day, *hodie*, is clearly a holiday or holy day. Christmas is especially so, but the point applies more generally, since in the annual liturgical round any day can be a feast day, a holy-day, not only as commemorative of a past historical moment or person but as an anticipation of the leisure and pleasure of heaven, a holiday, an a-temporal version of what a post-resurrection existence might be like.

In a monastery, feast-days were each characterised by different degrees of festive celebration and relaxation, depending upon the character or comparative status of the feast-day and what or whom was being celebrated. A 'double' feast might merit an extra treat in the monastic menu. A Saint's feast-day is not so much the memorial day of a death as a day of rejoicing in the culmination of a life entering into heaven and taking us also towards the promise of doing so ourselves. A holy day is a celebration that this day – *hodie* – is also a day in heaven, a day with no labour, a perpetual holiday, the end of labour time. Perhaps imagined as a return to the garden, a place of serenity, of warmth, sunlight, gentle breezes, flowers and fountains. Spending one's time in leisurely singing or gardening is after all surely the activity of a class with no need to work – *otium* was one word for such a privileged absence of labour.

However, what if *every* day is a holiday, or more exactly a day without work? It could be said that many forms of *otium* simply fill up one's time with pointless activity, as in combating the tedium (*taedium*) of an Imperial court routine of endless 'entertainments' pursued according to strict protocol rules, regulations, and observances, as in the courtier existence portrayed in Rossellini's film *La prise du pouvoir de Louis XIV*. Or perhaps think of living perpetually in a 'care home', listening every day to communal music performances as a variation upon watching continual sport on television, or finding yet another book to read, and otherwise just waiting for death. The difficulty of extending the notion of 'holiday' to every day and to eternity is partly that we find it difficult to envisage an existence

without boredom, without some variations upon the repetitious, and perhaps above all a sense of some change in activity as finally necessary.

One achievement of the (largely anonymous) corpus of the 'Gregorian' chant repertoire in the context of the Benedictine monastic rule and way of life may have been that it had once reconciled the balance needed between *cantare* and *laborare*, allowing sufficiently flexible variations in each day's combination of liturgical activity and necessary work, originally including physical work, so that the monastic life was not an emptily repetitive 'holiday' prone to boredom but could act as a potentially attractive model of a heavenly parallel to, and complementary with, or partly shared by, the monastic way of life itself, particularly if the *chorus angelorum* had apparently found a form of activity to engage them joyously even for eternity. Nevertheless, the monk quoted earlier would surely not have been alone in his boredom.

St Gallen

Let us probe a little further into the long history of the liturgy, referencing for convenience a different CD recording, *Music and Poetry in St Gallen : ninth century sequences and tropes,* by the Ensemble Gilles Binchois. The recordings are based upon a manuscript derived from the monastery of St Gallen, a Benedictine foundation close to Lake Constance. Among the hundred or so copies of versions of this manuscript still found across Europe we know that one was at Canterbury, the so-called *Canterbury Troper* which is also a source for the better known *Winchester Troper*.

Scholarly work on mediaeval drama invariably cites a particular sequence from this St. Gall manuscript, known as the *Quem quaeritis* ('whom are you seeking?'), as an early example of liturgical dramatisation, since it indicates that the Easter liturgy involved a choir boy representing an angel responding to the women visiting the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. The *Regularis Concordia* includes the first mention of this proto-drama in England. Drama of course is also supposedly the 'enactment' *now* of a past event, as is the sacrament of the mass.

However, it is not the *Quem quaeritis* which directly interest me, at the moment. I want particularly to comment upon some liturgical texts in the St. Gall manuscript which are earlier versions of those we have already noted. One is:

Hodie cantandus est nobis puer
quem gignebat ineffabiliter ante tempora pater,
et eundem sub tempore generavit inclita mater.

Today we must sing of the child whom His Father begot,
words cannot tell how (*ineffabiliter)*,
before time began, and whom His glorious mother bore in time.

So *hodie*, today, this day, now, we must sing, or rather there must be singing, with the word *nobis* (to/for us) indicating both 'singing by us' and 'the child for us', the child whom the Father begot, but in some fashion that is beyond speech, apophatic, ineffable (*ineffabiliter*). Though perhaps not beyond singing, which is perhaps why we 'must' sing, why there *has* to be singing, to respond to the inexpressible, including the inter-twined paradoxes, that this child was begotten (past tense) but before all past tenses, before all time(s) and yet (at the same time) was generated '*sub tempore*', in time, by his 'glorious' (*inclita*) mother.

The phrase *Hodie cantandus* again gives us that pivotal term *hodie*, today, while echoing the phrase we have already commented upon, *cantate canticum novum*, 'sing a new song', which would have been deeply appropriate to the St. Gall monastery since it prided itself upon its innovation in forms of chant. The text continues as question and answer:

> *[Interrogatio] Quis est iste puer, quem tam magnis praeconiis dignum vociferatis? Dicite nobis, ut collaudatores esse possimus.*
> [Question] Who is that child whom you proclaim to deserve such mighty praises? Tell us, that we too may together join in his praise.

Collaudatores again. The answer comes from another solo tenor:

> *[Responsio] Hic enim est, quem presagus et electus symmista dei,*
> *ad terras venturum praevidens, longe ante praenotavit sic que praedixit: . . .*
>
> [Answer] It is He whom the prophetic and chosen partaker of God's secrets, foreseeing that He should come to earth, disclosed long in advance and foretold in these words: . . .

The answer, explanation, clarification, introduces another set of temporal paradoxes: this child, about whom we sing 'today', was fore-told long ago, by the prophets, who not only fore-saw (*prae-videns*) and fore-noted (*prae-notavit*) but actually fore-said (the repetition of *prae-* makes the temporality emphatic) in these very words from long ago, words which the whole community now joins in singing, now not ineffable but familiar, God-given words since they are a quotation from *Isaiah* 9:6, though the final phrase is modified:

> *Puer natus est nobis, et filius datus est nobis:*
> *cuius imperium super humerum eius,*
> *et vocabitur nomen eius, magni consilii Angelus.*
>
> Unto us a boy is born, unto us a son is given,
> and the government shall be upon his shoulders,
> and his name shall be called Angel of Mighty Counsel.

The child of the question and answer is now identified, as a child given in the present (*natus est* combines past and present) to us, given (the rhyming *datus est*) as a son *to* us, who in the future will receive the name (*vocabitur*) Angel of Mighty Counsel. We are now explicitly invited (by ourselves) to sing a new song, *canticum novum*, a solo voice leading the whole choir into the singing of a song about a new song, except that it is an old song, as we have already noted, from the opening of Psalm 97, celebrating marvels which the Lord has already done in the past (*fecit*):

> *Cantate domino canticum novum: quia mirabilia fecit.*
> Sing unto the Lord a new song, for He has done marvellous things.

And then a solo voice leads the whole choir into the old familiar, ever repeated, doxology which ends, of course, if daily repetition has not deadened our awareness, in yet another affirmation of temporal paradoxes, a proclamation which again and always strains the tenses. As a Liverpudlian schoolboy once translated it: 'He was was, is was, and always will was'. Yet again:

> *Gloria Patri et Filio et spiritui sancto, sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum Amen.*
> Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in tbe beginning, is now, and evermore shall he, world without end, Amen.

But this opening (*introit*) has not yet ended: the solo re-emerges with both a variation and a new affirmation: that today Christ, now named, is born

> *Hodie natus est Christus, gaudent omnes angeli in caelis*
> Today Christ is born, all the angels in heaven rejoice.

So the voice invites us not only to sing a new song but to sing it with the angels who live, now and always, in heaven itself, so that we too begin to become '*collaudatores*' with the heavenly choir, singing the very same words as the angels, no longer ineffable but now heavenly, repeating in full chorus our previous song, a new song, and concluding with the word *Angelus* which invokes our affinity with the divine realm of rejoicing song:

> *Gaudete et vos fratres carissimi et dicite eia:*
> [Rejoice you too, dearly beloved brothers, and say:]
> *Puer natus est nobis, et filius datus est nobis:*
> *cuius imperium super humerum eius,*
> *et vocabitur nomen eius, magni consilii Angelus.*

And so the daily liturgy repeats itself, its old words and ever-new song, in that strange and paradoxical temporality of celebration. *Hodie*, today. And every day of a monk's life. The repeated *hodie* as the very texture of that life.

Thus, almost to repeat ourselves again, around that word *Hodie* is constructed a pattern of tenses, past, present, and future, as we move from a prophecy of what is to come to a celebration of what has happened, all of these occurring *Hodie*, today. And in practice it is always today that we sing a new chant which is not at all new: it has been sung many times before, just as this day has been celebrated many times before and will continue to be celebrated in the future. All of which is profoundly different from the notions of time and history and 'succession' which we considered in relation to the nave. Perhaps a proleptic glimpse of 'heaven' time as remote from our ordinary everyday notions of time as the post-Einstein concepts which figured in the comments on Pecham.

poli voce

Represented on this recording is an attempted re-enactment of a choir, at some moment from the sixth to the tenth century A.D., singing words from a text written perhaps a thousand or more years before, by somebody in a quite different situation and context. The original texts referred frequently to another 'future', which reminds us that *Hodie / this day* when celebrated now in the chant is itself already a paradoxical temporality, simultaneously involving past present and future, an attempted intersection between the now and the eternal.

The chants for the various Masses of Christmas Day are thus part of, and explicitly assert themselves to be moments in, a cycle of liturgical ritual which is repeated on an 'annual' basis and the monks who sang these liturgical texts will have done so and will do so again and again. *Hodie* is always the inter-section of the temporal and the eternal: including the moment of incarnation, when the divine eternal God becomes the temporal human. This is a mystery or paradox but in the action of celebrating it we have an enactment of one aspect of that mystery.

The *Alleluia* for the same mass again emphasises 'today' and affirms, as is appropriate for the daylight mass, that a great light has indeed descended upon the earth:

> *Dies sanctificatus illuxit nobis: venite gentes, et adorate dominum: quid hodie descendit lux magna super terram. Alleluia.*
> The day made holy has dawned upon us. Come and adore the Lord: for today a great light has descended upon the earth.

The Sequence for the Christmas Day Mass is sung by alternating or antiphonal choirs (A and B) but with a continuous syntactical meaning across the alternating verses:

A: Natus ante saecula dei filius invisibilis, interminus,
B: Per quem fit machina caeli ac terrae, maris et in his degentium,
A: Per quem dies et horae labant et se iterum reciprocant,
B: Quem angeli in arce poli voce consona semper canunt:
A: Hic corpus assumpserat fragile sine labe originalis criminis de carne Mariae virginis, quo primi parentis culpam Aevaeque lasciviam tergeret.
B: Hoc praesens diecula loquitur praelucida, adaucta longitudine, quod sol verus radio sui luminis vetustas mundi depulerit genitus tenebras. . .

A: Born before the ages, God's son, invisible, unending,
B: through whom the fabric of heaven and earth, the sea and the creatures living therein,
A: through whom the days and hours pass away and succeed each other again
B: whom the angels in the citadel of heaven hymn always with harmonious voice:
A: He had taken on a frail body without the stain of original sin from the flesh of the Virgin Mary, with which to wipe away the fault of our first father and the wantonness of Eve.
B: This the present day proclaims, most bright, increased in length, because the true sun with the ray of its light has driven deep down the ancient darkness of the world. . .

And six more lines. Again we have the relationship between this day which is present to us and the a-temporality of the divine, before all ages, and through whom our own days and hours pass and succeed. And though Christmas day is notionally the winter solstice, that last verse exults in a poetic paradox: that this shortest day has been lengthened by the true sun whose light shines both visibly and invisibly upon us. We are again reminded that our singing is a kind of co-participation with the singing of the angels above in their almost unimaginable 'aeviternity' and the Latin at this point gives us a phrase which will have an on-going history: *poli voce*, or poly phony.

Easter expectation

We can now change focus to the other great feast of the liturgical year, that of Easter. But first, as prelude and exercise, I would suggest, particularly to anyone unfamiliar with monastic chant, that you might listen to a specific rendition of one of the great hymns of the mediaeval period, known as the *Exultet* and sung in the midnight hours before Easter Sunday. It probably dates from around the sixth century and is still sung today, as in a video from the Abbey of Fontfroide, recorded in April 2013, and in some

respects preferable to the various other online versions (or 'performances'?) of the hymn. It is available on YouTube at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nP_5YxIAV2E

The performance includes a magnificent paean to beeswax!

Easter Sunday celebrates the resurrection of Jesus which is the other pole of the Christmas incarnation, with the normal human passage from birth to death being triumphantly superseded by the resurrection of the Christ, with a further climax to occur at the Ascension when Jesus returns to heaven, and another when he returns at the 'second coming', each occasion effecting a different intersection of terrestrial time and divine domain. There is no feast-day explicitly for the 'second coming', so the Apocalypse, or final judgement, is in effect assimilated into the celebration of resurrection.

The Easter night vigil, between Jewish Sabbath and Christian Sunday, is especially one of expectation, of awaiting the risen Lord, which will occur again, within the liturgical cycle, as both a proclamation that this present Sunday is a celebration of the belief that he did appear on the first Easter and the hope that – until he comes! – perhaps even now this is the very day (*Hodie!*) upon which the risen Lord will again appear.

We can here therefore suggest a second early christian belief as having arguably shaped the eventual emergence of the monastic liturgical office, and which therefore helps answer my two persistent questions.

In some accounts of the very first phases of the earliest Christian communities, the Easter Vigil was when the most committed and convinced believers in an imminent Second Coming of Christ persistently expected that event to take place on a Sunday, possibly any Sunday, but most fittingly upon Easter Sunday. Above all perhaps *this* Easter Sunday. Today. *Hodie*.

A version of such an account is suggested by the densely detailed scholarship of Christopher Page in his *The Christian West and its Singers* : *The First Thousand Years* (2010) and I can extrapolate from his work, though only as speculative hypothesis. One origin of what eventually developed into the monastic liturgical office lay in the very early practice of an assembly of Christian believers holding a night-long vigil on the Saturday before Easter Sunday, in the fervent hope that the promised return of Jesus would indeed occur at midnight on that very day. The waiting time was filled with the continuous singing of Psalms. That expectant awaiting in the night-hours for the imminent event became a repeated liturgical 'vigil' as the years and decades passed without the expected second coming.

One rationale for the continued and stubborn expectation of an imminent Second Coming was that the promised kingdom was actually to be established on earth itself. If Christ truly was bodily resurrected and had been palpably present to his chosen disciples after his resurrection then his mode of existence must still remain somehow bodily or material, a resurrected body. And therefore the notion of the kingdom as itself to be

established upon this earth was initially more credible than any post-death existence of body-less spirits in an unimaginable topography. Which meant that one might expectantly practice an entire style of life which itself anticipated that coming kingdom and in effect repudiated the norms of contemporary society.

As the number of Christian converts and everyday believers increased there perhaps developed a growing distinction between the ordinary congregation celebrating a weekly Sunday service, initially mainly in households, and the more fervent practitioners of a regular Saturday night-long vigil with its own extensive psalm chanting, readings, hymns, sermons, conducted by the self-selecting 'ascetics and virgins' (to use a phrase of Pseudo-Clement). As this committed minority persisted in their hopes, they added to their night vigil an accumulation of additional prayer services registering significant moments in the day of Christ's crucifixion, the third and sixth 'hours' of that day, and so on. On this account, the main night vigil eventually gestated into what became Matins and the additional devotional practices generated the 'minor offices'. The convergence of these practices with other strands in early Christianity, including Egyptian desert communities and solo hermits, need not be disentangled here, but a few points can be highlighted.

For example, the Laeodecia Synod, one of the earliest to leave a record of its stipulations concerning the conduct of liturgical services, complained that some Christians were 'worshipping' angels, which could be interpreted as an accusation of Gnosticism. Since however angels had consistently been the privileged messengers announcing to humans the Annunciation, the Incarnation, and the Easter resurrection, it was not implausible that that they would also have advance knowledge as to the day of the Second Coming and that they would have insider knowledge as to the correct procedures for worship and praise.

Later accounts of these early developments sometimes figure the alleged contribution of Angels to the monastic liturgy in particular. John Cassian's imaginative version of the early church in *Institutes* (Book II), includes in a somewhat anachronistic Chapter 5 'How the fact that the number of the Psalms was to be twelve was received from the teaching of an angel.':

> There was such a holy difference of opinion in their pious discussion on the rule of their religion that the time for their Vesper office came before the sacred question was decided; and, as they were going to celebrate their daily rites and prayers, one rose up in the midst to chant the Psalms to the Lord. And while they were all sitting (as is still the custom in Egypt), with their minds intently fixed on the words of the chanter, when he had sung eleven Psalms, separated by prayers introduced between them, verse after verse being evenly enunciated, he finished the twelfth with a response of *Alleluia,* and then, by his sudden

> disappearance from the eyes of all, put an end at once to their discussion and their service.

The *Alleluia* acclamation was itself interpreted by some medieval writers as a fragment of angelic song.

Pierre Battifol in his *History of the Roman Breviary* (1912, p, 362) quotes from a 10th century manuscript copy of an ancient Poitiers Pontifical:

> For indeed it is an Apostolic tradition that at midnight on this most sacred night the Lord will come to judgment . . . and as it is reported on the testimony of truthful persons who in our times have come from Jerusalem, the faithful there, being instructed in this authoritative tradition, assemble in the church for the vigil on Easter Eve, as if ready to receive the Lord, and hasting unto His judgment; and with minds filled with anxious devotion await the hour named in the Gospel in silence and fear. The clergy also, with their Pontiff, abiding in the church that night, wait for the predicted hour with fear and devotion; nor do they begin Mass until one of the lamps in the Sepulchre of our Lord has been lighted by angelic ministration (*nec ante ingrediuntur ad missas quam una ex lampadibus in sepulchro Domini per angelicam illuminetur administrationem*).

According to the 5th-century church historian Socrates Scholasticus in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (VI, 8) it was said that antiphonal chanting dated back to the early Saint Ignatius, who had seen in a vision the angels chanting in this fashion the praises of the Holy Trinity, and imitated this heavenly vision in his church at Antioch. Since the lay-out of the debating chamber in the British House of Commons supposedly derives from the arrangement of stalls facing each other in an antiphonal choir, it is mildly pleasing to think that Members of Parliament now take their seats in an angelic architectural formation. More significantly, the dissemination and perpetuation of that design meant that the much later chanting monks were addressing and listening to each other not as an audience or congregation but as co-participants in the liturgy, in particular taking turns to chant the consecutive verses of the Psalms. And above them, as they hoped, the Angels were joining in.

It has been argued that the conversion of Emperor Constantine by 337 C.E. remorselessly led to the incorporation of the Christian religion into the state apparatus of Byzantium, which may have suited the average acquiescent Christian but perhaps also considerably re-shaped and further displaced what had originally been the fervent voluntary practices of 'ascetics and virgins', which now became even more separate and distinct from the institutionalised ritual practice of the ordinary local Christian community and congregation increasingly organised under the supervision of the Bishop in a particular city.

Meanwhile, in the imperial capital itself the Christian liturgical practice was transmuted into a form of religious 'service' decidedly akin to the elaborate ceremonies of the imperial court. We know that the detailed staging of the Sunday Mass in the Hagia Sophia basilica was implemented with the help of the imperial court officials. Eventually the model of the Imperial court even provided a powerful image of heaven itself and an exemplar for the development and the elaboration of the Christian liturgy.

I have highlighted a persistent motif in the liturgical texts which suggests that chanting the specifically monastic liturgy here below ideally involved or proleptically included becoming co-participants or *co-laudatores* with the angelic choir above and daily practising to share its perpetual song in heaven. The tract before the Gospel reading on Holy Saturday begins:

> Laudate Dominum omnes gentes et *collaudate* eum omnes populi.

Perhaps the liturgical innovation of dramatising the appearance of the Angels at the empty tomb on Easter Day might even have been to entice a personal appearance from the *chorus angelorum*.

In this framework the whole lifetime of a monk was to be spent in daily expectation of the hopefully imminent end of this world from which he had so deliberately disaffiliated himself, to become in effect a committed 'trainee angel', a choral apprentice, even perhaps aspiring to the status of a heavenly child, an ambition which found support in the Luke and Matthew passages quoted earlier.

That notion implicitly provided the underlying premise of the monastic liturgical practices and especially a justification for perpetual singing. The suggestion that the monastic choir should have regarded themselves as the terrestrial branch of the *chorus angelorum* is no more or less credible than the notion of the replacement of the fallen angels by resurrected humans, and both early Christian beliefs may have been among the now half-forgotten suppositions which underpinned the thousand-year development of a daily commitment which had no logical stopping point short of a perpetual all-absorbing commitment to endless chanting.

However, one of the notions found in some more mystical regions of later Jewish biblical commentary was that some angelic orders were created only in order to perform a single act of worship and then cease to exist, their sole function being encompassed in that instantaneous act, a momentary creation and simultaneous oblivion. Those with no love of endless ecclesiastical chanting and of Byzantine court ceremonial might have preferred that alternative.

texts

One implication of a liturgy supposedly performed both on earth and in heaven, by a monastic community and the angelic chorus as *co-laudentes*, is that the texts sung might be shared while the music may not be, or vice-

versa, so the relation between the two choirs was implicitly or potentially polyphonic. And perhaps also poly-textual, unless the angelic choir is to sing a text-less music of pure melody and vocalised harmony. For Dante the music in *Paradiso* may be textually indecipherable or even unintelligible to human ears, and singing in the highest circle of heaven is quite ineffable.

However, a text sung by both earthly and divine choirs would surely be a divine text, God's very own words. Which is largely the case with the monastic liturgy anyway, since almost every word or phrase uttered in the office is a quotation or adaptation of a biblical text, except readings taken from the Fathers or from hagiographical sources. Moreover, the whole of the Bible was treated in the liturgy as a single text with multiple cross-connections, which we might now call hyper-links, since it was regarded as the composition of a single author, the inspired word of the one God.

A musical analogy would be if the totality of Western classical music was regarded not only as written by a sole composer but as a single gargantuan composition. A comparison would be a Borgesian notion that the whole of English literature constitutes a single work, authored by one writer. Any ramified resonances between *Beowulf, Canterbury Tales, King Lear, Middlemarch*, *Four Quartets* and *Ulysses*, could then be regarded as providing evidence for the intentions and even the personality of the supposed overall single author. Indeed, given the actual inter-connecting filiations of debt, influence, and deliberate intertextuality, the exercise would not be without its plausibility. From one perspective, what we call the Bible is simply a multi-genre collection of the extant miscellaneous written output of a particular tribal or national society generated over more than a thousand years, but in the eyes, and ears, of believers it is a single composite text.

In the practice of *sortes virgilianae* a Roman reader might consult a copy of Virgil in order to alight upon some personally significant verse, as one might today reach for a quotation from Shakespeare suitable for a particular occasion. His *Sonnets* may well have been a collection of poems designed to provide precisely for that usage. Similarly, readers of the Bible have in various ways been encouraged to look for and find within the overall text some compellingly appropriate application of its text to themselves, especially from the hundred and fifty Psalms. The overall liturgical office is almost a variant of this practice, insofar as the texts chosen for the collects, antiphons, responsories, and so on, for a particular feast-day are taken or adapted from the whole range of the biblical texts to provide suitable words of celebration and commemoration for a specific saint or occasion, whatever the original reference or context of such extracts or quotations might have been. Moreover, the collective subject of the mediaeval mode of interpretative application was not so much the individual as 'the church', the supposed successor to Israel as God's chosen people.

On this view, the entire biblical text constituted a tissue of literal, allegorical, moral, and prophetic meanings and applications written by the single divine inspiring author, however mediated by the separate authors of

its various constituent works. Believing readers could institute for themselves a self-validating procedure, finding and appropriating almost any passage for particular devotional and polemical purposes but selecting only those supportive of their own preferred position. Which involved seeking somehow to reconcile patently diverse facets and apparently contradictory characteristics of the divine agent by attributing to the ultimate author an enigmatic and even baffling composite nature. The frequent divine manifestations of both ostensibly outraged wrath and equally inexplicable gestures of mercy, and the combination of occasional intervention with persistent indifference, had to be reconciled even if in potentially paradoxical formulations. The book of Job might be considered the knottiest example in the Old Testament and the crucifixion of Christ as its New Testament counterpart.

Yet even prayerful meditation might yield not so much a spiritual enlightenment or theological clarification as simply a submissive acquiescence in a 'mystery'. It is characteristic of much patristic writing, and Augustine in particular, to assemble a montage of phrases and sentences taken from a diversity of locations within the overall sacred scripture and to treat each quoted fragment as having more or less equal weight in a theological exposition, a literary practice arguably more pervasively characteristic of modern 'fundamentalist' belief in the 'inerrancy' of Scripture than even a simple-minded literalism.

Jerome

It is then almost ironically the case that the mediaeval Christian biblical text was in fact largely the product of a single author, since the actual texts used in most Latin liturgies predominantly derived from the various translations undertaken by Jerome in the fourth century. The result of reading the Bible mainly in Jerome's recognisable and distinctive flavour of Latin was to register an overall stylistic character, a more or less homogeneous application of a version of post-classical Latin not very successfully adapted to some of the genres which comprise the Hebrew Bible, though perhaps more faithful to the predominantly *koine* Greek of the New Testament. It was almost as if a single Chinese translator had produced in idiosyncratic Mandarin a version of the whole of European literature from Homer to Gibbon.

Having first revised and amended the various existing Latin translations of parts of the Bible, Jerome then translated the whole of the Greek Septuagint version (circa 200 BC?) of the Hebrew Bible, the 'Old Testament', and also translated the four Gospels from Greek, but he only lightly revised existing Latin versions of the rest of the New Testament. However, Jerome's later extensive translations of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew (partly based upon Origen's *Hexapla* version) was not accorded any official ecclesiastical approval. In particular, his translation

of the Psalms from the Hebrew never fully displaced the palimpsest of inadequate Latin versions which came to constitute the Vulgate Psalter, to be endlessly repeated and excerpted at the very core of the liturgical office.

While the biblical commentaries which Archbishop Theodore of Tarsus composed and taught at Canterbury in the seventh century make occasional direct reference to the Greek text of the New Testament (Theodore was after all a fellow citizen of Paul's Tarsus) those commentaries were written and presumably delivered in Latin, though there remains the pleasing possibility that Greek was then, exceptionally, taught in Canterbury for a brief period. (*Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian*, ed. B. Bischoff and M Lapidge, 1994)

However, even if the Latin used in the liturgy largely derived from Jerome's various translations, the notion that this version of the biblical text could be regarded as literally the very word of God remained problematic, if only because various previous different translations remained in circulation, and the numerous quotations from the Bible incorporated in their writings by the early Fathers themselves preceded or diverged from what became known as the Vulgate. Which was the authentic word? Which version of the Latin did God prefer? Which might properly be set to music?

For example, the impressive mid-12th century manuscript known as Edwine's Psalter or the *Canterbury Psalter*, mentioned previously, has on each page three columns of text with three different Latin versions of the psalms, the Hebraicum, Gallican, and Romanum. The Hebraicum also has an inter-linear French translation, and the Romanum an inter-linear Anglo-Saxon version, while the Gallican has both inter-linear and marginal explanatory glosses but only in Latin. Each psalm is also provided with a pictorial illustration which takes the form almost of a rebus, an image depicting not a single scene but an artificial composition of various visual prompts, referring to specific elements in each Psalm text visualised and arranged partly to facilitate memorisation of that Psalm.

These pictorial aids derived largely from an earlier ninth-century Psalter and indicate another variant of Lego-like construction, providing an assemblage of distinct units of meaning rather than any overall cohesive elucidation. Among the figures represented in many of these pictorial presentations in the Canterbury Psalter are numerous angels. It's worth noting that in the Septuagint, and partly perpetuated in the Vulgate, the term 'Elohim' for Yahweh in one compositional strand of the Old Testament was frequently substituted by the word for 'angels', prompting some continuing interpretative confusion.

Insofar as the texts of the liturgical offices were constructed from disparate passages, short extracts, and single verses taken from almost anywhere in the Bible, it was probably in a version or variation of Jerome's Latin style, upon the foundation of which a kind of verbal tapestry was woven, even if based upon what one might regard as more or less fortuitous verbal echoes in the Latin translations. Jerome himself

acknowledged (in his famous Letter 106) that his translation strategy was deliberately to match each individual Greek word with a specific Latin word, not primarily to clarify the overall sense of a passage. It was therefore upon the linguistic texture of Jerome's somewhat idiosyncratic Latin that later commentaries and *glossa* practices were predominantly based. Including not least Jerome's own extensive commentaries, which were certainly in the Canterbury Christ Church library, including his commentaries on Matthew and the minor prophets, on Isaiah, on Job, and on the Psalms, all extant in Canterbury manuscripts now in the Cambridge Trinity College library.

verbal webs

It was this Latin which was chanted or recited for several hours each day, though the psalms themselves might use a non-Jerome version. It was upon the basis of perceived assonances, echoes, parallels, inter-links, between individual words and phrases that the liturgical offices were composed, whether for a particular feast-day or an everyday ferial. The December 29th Office for Becket provided some examples earlier. The Latin Vulgate Bible and the Latin office could be treated as an almost infinite web of significant words (*Hodie*!) and the same phrase, passage, or quotation might be used in multiple varied combinations suitable for several different liturgical offices, even if sung to a distinct musical accompaniment on each occasion. However, the overall practice of setting these apparently interconnected fragments of texts to music generated two rather distinct possibilities.

One was the elaboration of a kind of overall liturgical hyper-text, an interconnecting filigree or network recognising or constructing resonances between multiple biblical passages which had originally been written in quite different historical circumstances and for various specific purposes but were now juxtaposed and interwoven as if constituting divinely intended chains of connections and layerings of significance. This was one basis for the relationship between type and anti-type as in the 'biblia pauperum' stained-glass windows and in numerous patristic commentaries. In any reading or recitation of the biblical text these cross-connections might encourage a form of fertile interpretative and devotional response to such interlacings, aural echoes, suggestive parallels, and so on.

One example of this process at work can be summarised from Jerome's own commentaries on *Zechariah, Hosea, Joel,* and *Malachi*, in J. N. D. Kelly's *Jerome* (1975, p. 293):

> [Jerome's] real concern . . was not primarily with the prophets' message for their own day, but with their significance for Christians. Quite a number of oracles were obvious enough, for they had already been fulfilled – and certified as fulfilled by the New Testament writers or the Lord himself – in the events of the Christian dispensation. Jesus, for

example, had taken Zechariah 13, 7, as predicting the scattering of the disciples after his arrest (Matthew 26, 31); while Hosea's (6, 2), 'On the third day he will raise us up' unquestionably points to the resurrection. Joel's prophecy (2, 28 – 32), 'I will pour out my spirit on all flesh' had been fulfilled, as Peter had confirmed (Acts 2, 14ff), in the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. In Mark 1, 2 we have inspired authority for understanding Malachi's (3, 1), 'Behold I shall send my messenger before my face', as spoken in advance by Christ of John the Baptist and his own earthly coming.

This is not unlike a Cantor assembling the components of a feast-day liturgical office. A very similar practice in a visual as well as textual register can be summarised from a scholarly account of a late Anglo-Saxon manuscript 'portrait' of the evangelist John, shown in an illustration as standing and writing besides a cross (Jennifer O'Reilly, in *Dunstan: His Life, Times and Cult,* edited by Richard Gameson, 1992*,* page 173):

> For monastic contemporaries the connection between John's account of the crucifixion and his closing apocalyptic vision would already have been familiar through standard exegesis on the wound in Christ's side. The chain of texts connecting the piercing of Christ's side in *John* 19: 34, both with the prophecy in *Zechariah* 12: 10: 'they shall look on me whom they have pierced', and with John's apocalyptic vision of the glorified Christ with wounded side (*Revelations* 1: 7), was often extended by allusion to another exegetical chain which also focused on John's eyewitness as an image of spiritual insight. In *John* 2: 19 – 22, Christ's body is identified with the Temple; commentators read this to interpret Christ's body as the church and the opening of his side as the source of the sacraments. The sacramental flow from Christ's wound seen by the evangelist John thus fulfilled Ezekiel's vision of the water of life flowing from the right side of the Temple in Jerusalem (*Ezekiel* 47:1), which is in turn evoked in St John's own eschatological vision of the healing water of life and the tree of life in the new Jerusalem (*Revelations* 22:1). The linking of these texts of vision and seeing was expressed liturgically in the Easter vigil antiphon *Vidi aquam.*

Such multiple resonances might well be recognised in a meditative individual's close reading of the text or during a sustained contemplation of an image. A common practice was to assign to each monk a single manuscript volume to be read or copied throughout the forty days of Lent, which gave sufficient time for what Anselm called 'chewing' the text. But could a similar process operate during the actual singing or chanting of texts and was it, as is sometimes assumed, a feasible function of the musical accompaniment to encourage or sustain an intensive but momentary engagement with such complex textual over-tones?

We have considered a few examples in the Becket Office of possible echoes of the stained-glass windows depicting Thomas's miracles and other allusions in that office which might have had a specific resonance for the monks singing in Canterbury cathedral itself. Slocum comments, for example, on some plausible Canterbury-specific references to 'stone' and 'crown' in the Becket liturgy. Similar interconnecting chains of association might easily be constructed upon, for example, the word *lignum*, referring to 'wood' but evoking references to a 'tree' which can variously relate to the 'Tree of Jesse' and thus to the genealogy of Christ, to the wooden cross of the crucifixion and the death of Christ, itself resonating with the Edenic tree of life and therefore the Fall, to the liturgical use of palms on Palm Sunday and Ash Wednesday, which included the application of ash as a memento of death, and perhaps even directly calling to mind the overhead tree-like tracery of the Cathedral architecture. Again, a window depicting the 'tree' of Jesse is to be found in the Corona in Canterbury cathedral.

These approaches to treating the text as an almost infinitely proliferating hypertext were allied with what was sometimes called the Alexandrian mode of exegesis which postulated at least four 'senses' to be discovered in every verse, the literal or historical, the allegorical, the moral, and the apocalyptic. It was possible to regard several senses as at work in the interpretation of a text, rather as one might have two or more lines of music or melodies accompanying a single text simultaneously, or vice versa. The densely rich volumes of Henri de Lubac's comprehensive study *Mediaeval Exegesis* (1959ff, ET 1998ff) display a hyper-textual erudition which might once have been assimilated by a practised monastic mind but is now available to us as the result of sustained scholarship and the availability of advanced search procedures in collections of digital texts covering the entire Christian Fathers and other liturgical sources.

We now need such aids to recognise what may once have been taken for granted as available in a trained memory. Not only were all monks obliged as novices to memorise at least the hundred and fifty Psalms but long years of constant repetition of recurrent texts, and of repeated musical motifs, within the liturgical cycle itself could instill a word-by-word and note-by-note recall, and not just of the Psalter. The opening words of each Psalm, the *incipit*, could be expected to evoke the entire text – an assumption shared, for example, by whoever wrote the last words of Jesus on the cross as the opening verse of Psalm 22, 1, quoted in Aramaic: "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (*Mark,* 15:34). The enormous *glossa ordinaria* conveniently compiled the different patristic interpretations to be studied and absorbed and it was common practice to assemble several senses at work. So when a mediaeval monk read or spoke these texts (and reading was effectively speaking aloud), in what sense or (multiple) senses was he 'meaning' them?

A distinction should be drawn between an individual monk writing or reading, commenting upon or interpreting, such entwined chains of association while working in the scriptorium or meditating in the cloister, as

compared with the daily activity of a monk in the choir singing what might be called an implicitly polytextual passage, for example the Easter antiphon *Vidi aquam*. While monks chanted were they explicitly conscious of the multiple associations sketched above, and with an immediate awareness of the numerous filiations attributable to almost any text? Were they 'remembering' texts as well as music? There are numerous impressive studies of the role of memory in mediaeval education and culture, while the function of memorisation and recall within the performance of the liturgy is an intriguing topic (see *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory*, Anna Maria Busse Berger , 2005).

impersonal prayer

However, let me consider one aspect of how monks might have read the texts incorporated into the liturgy. In his *The Psalms are Christian Prayer* (1961) Thomas Worden (who, incidentally, once taught me Hebrew), argues that the Christian reader of the Psalms might appropriately postulate or imagine a kind of personal link or parallel between their own present situation and that of the 'speaker' of, for example, a psalm, almost in a form of identification with the *persona* which variously articulates a complaint or thanksgiving, an affirmation of trust or declaration of guilt, an expression of joy and wonder, or grief and remorse.

This argument might perhaps be plausibly directed at an individual priest reciting the obligatory daily breviary and able to pause and contemplate or meditate upon the words being recited. In voicing a particular text, we might indeed try to regard it as somehow allegorically or analogically applicable to our own situation. Even though what some commentators call the *Sitz im leben*, the 'life situation', of the original biblical authors as the contexts which gave rise to these texts, may not clearly characterise our own present situation, a parallel might be felt as actual for us in some way. We can relatively easily endeavour to extract from a biblical text some 'lesson' detachable from the original situation and regard it as plausibly applicable to our own. We might seek to experience or encourage specific emotions or feelings which we think were originally expressed from within that situation and which we might want to share in the present, by trying to prompt and stimulate or even simulate them as our own. The Psalms in particular have long provided the words for such a practice in private prayer.

In this sense, the Bible might almost be read so as to constitute its own 'situation', its own context of interpretation, which is not tied to the particular *Sitz im leben* of its original authors or the intentions of the later biblical compilers, but as it now exists in the a-temporal realm of God. All its meanings are *tota simul*, simultaneously operative, a facet of the omniscience of God himself. From this notion developed the belief that the Bible itself had existed from all eternity, a claim also attributed in Islam to the Koran. Since Wisdom was present, as the scripture says, at the

beginning of the world, so in the beginning was the Word, identified both with eternal wisdom and with the son of God, as himself God's own word. Moreover, the reading of the Bible as the divine word could also be perpetuated into eternity, providing proliferating meanings to be explored through the infinite combinations and permutations of the existing biblical texts. One Kabbalistic tradition perhaps suggests that when the Messiah comes he will insert into the sacred text a missing secret letter of the Hebrew alphabet, thereby radically modifying and wonderfully expanding the senses of the divine composition.

And yet. Was this overall approach or procedure of personal resonance applicable or appropriate to day-to-day liturgical singing in the choir? Were the monks who recited or sang the psalms appropriating them as their own words in their own situation, ventriloquising the words of the psalmist, or of God himself, and directly addressing those words to themselves? Was the specific effect of singing the divine office (as distinct from a solitary reading of a biblical text) to adopt a *persona* whereby I align myself, identify myself with, not merely a past prophet or the voice of Israel but as myself a divine messenger (an angel) to myself, presenting to myself the very voice of God himself? On that basis the music would indeed have needed to become more elaborate and extended, to provide sufficient time for such complex 'meditation' and ongoing rumination.

I would suggest, however, that though the written liturgical texts might well have been composed with an awareness of densely multiple associations, the actual performance of the sung text was in practice inevitably routinised. It's arguably misleading to assume that the multi-layered sense of the monastic liturgy was intended to be appreciated, still less instantly re-constituted, by the individual monks themselves even as they sang, however long a melisma might be extended upon a single word or syllable, as if it could momentarily be mentally or imaginatively elaborated into its multiple ramifications. Arguably, it was not in any case the function of the chanting to do so, since any such manifold meanings are already 'there' in the divine text itself and what the liturgical office primarily does is to release or activate the text for God's sake not for the monk's own comprehension. All the infinite possible overtones are always audible to God. Since he composed them.

The point of liturgical practice was primarily to acknowledge that the divine sense was already intrinsically present in the words themselves. In a different sense of 'co-laudare', it was the shared or distributed responsibility of the choir community as a whole to proclaim and enact the proper meaning or divine sense that was already intrinsically in the words themselves. Such an 'understanding' of the liturgical texts and the appropriate 'expression' of its music was perhaps more like setting prayer-bells ringing or a prayer-wheel turning, or the installing of stained glass windows high in the clerestory to be visible primarily for God's own 'eyes'.

Moreover, whereas in the practice of private or individual prayer we can choose to read specific texts, whatever the source, occasion, or period, we can hardly choose collectively to have specific emotions or feelings simply at will. Though the combination of texts constituting a particular feast-day might be designed to construct and even prompt a particular response, this was not the case with the normal daily recitation of the Psalms. Partly because the weekly sequence in which they were intoned was mainly the order of the numbering as given to them in the received biblical arrangement (the rationale for which has never been clear).

Though the five Psalms assigned for the office of Lauds were always those which especially expressed joyful praise (Psalms 66, 50, 148-150), there was no particular or discernible cohesion in the sequence of, say, the allocation of Psalms to Wednesdays. For the weekly course the Psalter was divided into two unequal parts, one of which extended from Psalm 1 to Psalm. 108 (Vulgate, *Deus laudem*), and was divided into seven portions, each comprising a Nocturn three of which were assigned to the Matins services of the seven days of the week. The other portion, extending from Psalm 109 (Vulgate, *Dixit dominus*) to the end, was also divided and assigned to the seven days of the week at Vespers. In addition, some verses and some Psalms were repeated frquently in the shaping of each office, Psalm 94 at Matins and Psalms 4, 90 and 133 at Compline, and some fixed Psalms allotted to the middle hours were not included in the overall sequence.

Following the weekly cycle, of reciting or chanting the Psalms and 'lessons' or 'readings' from the Old and New Testaments, was clearly not a matter of an individual unilaterally and deliberately choosing those texts in order to express some specific emotion, personal feeling, or private thoughts which they were endeavouring to articulate at this moment, but rather, in the process of singing a given sequence of Psalms during a particular liturgical hour, the words sung were 'originally' concerned with a fluctuating variety of situations and emotions. The very recitation of the words may or may not induce in the monastic speaker or singer some identification with the situation and feelings of the biblical author. But that was not the primary function of reciting them. The liturgical practice was essentially different from enacting any such identification. Which also implies a function for the liturgical music somewhat different from those we now tend to assume when performing or listening to music.

It was necessarily possible for a monk to say or sing the liturgical words without necessarily 'meaning' them at all, or without meaning them 'sincerely', yet nevertheless to perform the proper function of the liturgy. The recitation of a powerfully angry or poignantly distressed Psalm without necessarily feeling any appropriate emotions at the time of singing it might be compared to the alleged practice among traditional German sword-fencing student circles of uttering a formal statement: "I insult you", which though spoken in a polite and gentlemanly tone and with an impersonal dignity was nevertheless intended and duly taken as grounds for a duel. One

might also recall the Hollywood anecdote of a desperate committee of scriptwriters trying to find an additional gag or two, and finally circulating a suggestion to which everybody responded "That's funny" – without a single response of a smile or a laugh.

The normative instance of this version of an impersonal performative utterance within the overall liturgical ritual is that of the priest speaking the words of consecration during the Eucharist: *Hoc est enim corpus meum*, 'this is my body', spoken by the celebrant 'as if' he were Christ himself speaking those words but without any canonical requirement, in the mediaeval Catholic dispensation, for sincerely 'meaning' the words, still less 'identifying' himself with Jesus. The Eucharistic consecration of the bread and wine is not a personal statement but the implementation of an institutional function. As was the recitation of the monastic hours.

To regard the mediaeval monastic liturgy in terms of an expectation of some kind of personal identification with the text is arguably inappropriate to the actual performance of the liturgy. Similarly, to approach the music element of that liturgy or to respond critically to the practices of 'Gregorian' chant based upon an expectation that the music fails to be sufficiently expressive or emotionally appropriate is to assume a relation between text and music according to a crucially different model or motivation for singing and music in general.

This is not to deny that particular words in the text could be emphasised and highlighted, by the addition of a more or less elaborate melismatic elaboration which draws attention to them, though that emphasis was usually implemented by the provision of a collect or antiphon consisting of a verse or two selected from the overall texts being recited or sung. Or to forget that sometimes monastic singing could indeed involve and generate considerable emotional engagement, as in the performance of the *Exultet*. But what then is an appropriate model for understanding the practice of spending up to eight hours a day singing? And how did a more 'modern' conception of the function of 'sacred' music arise? One indirectly illuminating framework can be suggested from a perhaps unfamiliar domain.

A poignant memoir entitled *The Last Brahmin,* written by Rani Siva Sankara Sarma (translated from Telegu by Delluri Venkat Rao, 2007) makes it clear that the daily reciting of the sacred words, the repeated chanting of the ancient writings, had absolutely no rationale except to honour and perpetuate the ancestral ways of doing those things. The Brahmin himself is perfectly clear that in one sense his activity is acknowledged by him as certifiably insane, and that he is consciously sustaining a meaningless behaviour as a ritual not based upon any personal 'belief', but as an inherited way of life rather than the affirmation of any 'religion'. Venkat Rao's introducton should be read alongside his *Cultures Of Memory In South Asia* (2014) and a complementary study *The Heathen in his Blindness*, by S. N.

Balagangadhara which argues the case that 'Hinduism' is not and never was a 'religion' in the Western sense.

court acclamations

While music on earth might be composed and performed for the sake of a specific occasion or situation, an ecclesiastical feast-day or a royal celebration, a funeral or a victory, a wedding or a birthday, by comparison the unchanging situation and function of the *chorus angelorum* singing in heaven could be defined simply as the performance of 'music' itself as the central eternal activity of their continuously praising God, a royal choir permanently assembled around the throne of the King of Kings. An endlessly repeated *Gloria, Alleluia, Amen, Kyrie*, and doxology would in effect be interminable court acclamations.

Similarly, the recitation of the psalms, hymns, and other music in the daily monastic routine evokes a court ritual in which the psalms in particular are intoned not as a collective miming of vicarious experiences or as expressions of fervour by individual monks but more as a form of objective recall, a statement and record of what has allegedly happened in salvation history, combining the performance of endless praise with the role of a court chronicler or minstrel singing of past royal deeds.

So the biblical accounts of despair or complaint, joy or praise, are performed not as expressions of what the monastic singer is now supposed to feel but rather presented as recalling what the psalmist or prophet recorded himself as experiencing, as significant moments in the history of the chosen people. In that respect the sung or chanted parts of the liturgy also operate almost as a further variant upon the readings (*lectiones*), which provided historical narratives or explanations. The lessons are listened to as also primarily *historia*, though inclined towards appropriate moral exhortation or exemplary lesson.

Eventually, the liturgical readings for each saint's feast-day became the subject of the sustained historical investigations of the Bollandists, in the formidable *Acta Sanctorum,* arranged for publication according to the sequence of liturgical feasts for each month, first published in 1643 and still ongoing in the *Analecta Bollandiana*. The task of this unparalleled scholarly project was and is precisely to filter out hagiography not justified by authentic historical records. Which is why St George disappeared from the liturgy, to the chagrin of some English patriots. There is a certain parallel with the earlier impact of philosophical scholasticism provoking scepticism. But the essentially 'historical' texts as taken from the Bible, whether spoken, sung, recited, or intoned, set to music or otherwise, were not personal affirmations or expressions except in so far as they articulated a collective history and identity, as in the great Jewish ritual affirmation of the Passover *Haggaah*. Nevertheless, in a context of private prayer the very same texts might perform other and different functions.

The various anthems, hymns, lessons, responds, collects, and psalms for each day in the course of the year, constitute one single ongoing act of worship and all the components, textual and musical, are primarily fulfilling that function. The persistent effect of the intonation or chant, coupled with the consistent tone and flavour of the Latin translation, was to homogenise all the texts as if derived from one voice, one source, one origin, ultimately the *persona* or voice of God himself, which can hardly be imitated or enacted.

Since the whole biblical text was considered to be the 'word' of God, one way of conceiving of liturgical prayer is therefore as a vicarious participation in the process of God himself both speaking and listening to his own word or Word. One claim made on behalf of the practice of prayer was that it was in some sense a sharing in the life of the Trinity, in the divine communication between the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. (See for example Hans Urs von Balthasar *Prayer*). Whatever sense one might make of this theological conundrum, the act of praying would then be not so much a matter of 'meaning' or even understanding the texts as of taking part in the life of God himself. As in the rationale for the very existence of the *chorus angelorun*.

Precisely what words the angels sing might be intermittently revealed to us, most particularly in their guest appearance to the shepherds on Christmas Day. The alleged words on that occasion eventually became incorporated into the general liturgy as the *Gloria*, to be sung almost as regularly as the Creed itself. It was thought by some that angelic tones might also be faintly audible in the text-less music of the spheres, for which some angels were apparently responsible. Here below there might be music for the sake of a text, composed to enhance the experience or the effect of the words, or there might be texts written for the sake of the music. But heavenly music could be claimed as effectively music for its own sake, which is simply for God's sake.

polyphony & paradox

I earlier considered some of the words used for the core liturgical activity of the monks, such as *cantare* and *orare*. But I have partly contested the claim sometimes made that the primary function of musical elaboration in plainchant, by the prolongation of multiple notes over the syllables of liturgical texts, was to provide extended moments during which monks would meditate on (*meditare*) the 'meaning' of what they were singing. Undoubtedly, a degree of deliberate 'reflection' was always part of the overall texture of the monastic experience, but one to be practised primarily in the cloister or scriptorium. The stimulus for a specifically intellectual response during the liturgy itself was most commonly a text which was read aloud, a *historia*, or an extended excerpt or *lectio* from the Bible or the Fathers, which had probably already been read and considered elsewhere.

More appropriate terms for the kind of attention accorded to the words of the liturgy might be confirmation, or endorsement, a form of reaffirmation of familiar expressions of a faith securely believed in.

Some liturgical texts set to music could include extremely succinct formulations of the central theological mysteries of the Christian belief-system. Such compression is characteristic of one mode of ecclesiastical Latin, which can compact words together into a pithy phrase requiring considerable un-packing. Singing such passages or phrases might have prompted a conscious appreciation of the complexity of a formulation which encapsulated the mysteries of the Trinity or the distinctly paradoxical status of the Virgin Mary. Even the repeated doxology might still prompt, assert, and condense a complex recognition of the relations between time and a-temporal eternity.

We have already glossed the implications of the single word *hodie* in the texts sung at Christmas and Easter. To use Anselm's term, you might 'chew' these random instances of compresssed texts, two taken from the *Magnus Liber organi* of Notre Dame for the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary:

> [Gradual] Oh virgin mother of God, he whom the whole world cannot contain, being made man, enclosed himself in your womb. (*quem totus non caput orbis in tua se clausit viscera factus homo*)

> [Offertory] Blessed are you Virgin Mary, the creator of all things you did bear: him who made you you did bring forth: (*que omnium portasti creatorem genuisti qui te fecit*) and a virgin ever more you remain .

And from a troped *Gloria* probably by Leonin:

> O Christ our chosen, you are the plectrum of our lyre,
> make us angelic and reform our form,
> make us angels by the capture of captivity.
> (*angelicis adapta formam nostram reforma*
> *nos angelis conforma captivitate capta.*)

A monk singing these lines would probably not have been struck momentarily with prolonged metaphysical wonder at the paradoxical character of such phrases. The full significance of a doctrinal formulation was not to be elicited by rapid attentiveness while actually singing, but was primarily a matter for prior reflective response and intellectual work undertaken at other times and places, to be assimilated as the framework for the daily chanting.

However, in the later mediaeval period the theological, metaphysical, and philosophical paradoxes which figure repeatedly in the liturgical texts were increasingly scrutinised in the mode of systematic analysis later labelled

scholasticism. Clearly, if those fundamental inquiries no longer provided a reassuring or even intelligible clarification of the positions articulated in the liturgy, they could undermine not only the familiar liturgical formulations themselves but the very rationale for the whole monastic way of life.

I was once browsing the philosophical department of a large London bookshop when an elderly Anglican vicar asked the sales assistant if he had any books to recommend on angels. It took the opportunist assistant a mere twenty minutes to persuade the susceptible vicar that nothing less than purchasing the complete 60-volume English edition of Aquinas's *Summa* would suffice. Arguably, that profitable recommendation was justified, since any attempt to think coherently and consistently about angels, let alone the incarnation or virgin motherhood, arguably requires an overall systematic philosophy and theology, and certainly demands rather more thinking time than a few extra moments of music can provide.

To take an apposite example, any notion of singing angels, let alone of co-singing with them, can sit uneasily with recognising the problematic status of angels, or the odd metaphysical notion of time-less heavenly music being somehow shared with a terrestrial monastic choir. Let me quote some summary passages from an article which considers in detail Aquinas's view of angels, 'The Angelic Doctor and Angelic Speech' by Harm Goris, published perhaps somewhat bizarrely in the *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 11 (1) pp. 87-105 (1988). Goris first indicates the biblical basis for the notion of angels speaking:

> Communication of angels among themselves or to God is reported in the call of Isaiah, where the seraphim call to one another the thrice holy (*Is.* 6:3), in the book of Revelation where the words of praise to the Lamb uttered by the elders and the angels are mentioned (*Rev.* 5:11f and 7:11f) and once in *Zech.* 1:12. However, all these examples occur within the context of human visions and, hence, describe angelic communication in a certain bodily form. This is not the case in *1 Cor.* 13:1: "if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels. . . . " This verse only mentions angelic speech without giving further information, but it is the only biblical passage that led Aquinas, in his commentary on the Pauline letters, to discuss the way angels talk among themselves.

However:

> [In the] commentar[ies] on the *Sentences*, angelic speech had become a standard subject of academic discussion. In [Aquinas's] commentary on the second book (ds. 11 q. 2 aa. 2–3), Aquinas dealt for the first time extensively with angelic speech, and he would resume the discussion twice in later works: in the *De Veritate* (q. 9), written in Paris between 1256 and 1259, and in the *Summa Theologiae* (I, qq. 106–7), written around 1267 to 1268 while Aquinas was in Rome.

Aquinas's conclusions are summarised:

> Among angels . . there cannot be any vocal speech because they are purely spiritual beings. Nevertheless, Aquinas wants to maintain the cor-respondence between angelic and human communication. Therefore, he introduces, instead of the sensible signs, intelligible signs, that signify the concept and that complete the process of angelic speech: when an angel coordinates the conceived *species* to one of the things that one angel can see naturally in another, this naturally known thing becomes a sign that expresses the inner concept. Such an expression is called speech, not vocal, but one that is expressed by intellectual signs. The same view is expressed in the *reportatio* on *1 Corinthians* 13:1. . .

Note that 'correspondence' here does not concern communication between angels and humans but how communication between humans might have a counterpart in communication between angels themselves. Goris suggests that 'The division into signs and nods is derived from the *Glossa*' and cites Lombard's *Collectanea in Epistolas Pauli, Ad I Cor*, where it is said that angels speak to each other by 'signs and nods.' One suspects that a more immediate source might have been the monastic 'sign language' familiar in any community where a rule of silence prevailed. But non-corporeal 'nods' are just as conceptually improbable as speech without vocal chords, or at least without brain implants, neither being an option for angels.

Certainly, any residual idea of singing monks as 'trainee angels' might seem distinctly problematic after reading Aquinas's lengthy treatment of angels. However, it was not only the notion of angels which Scholastic arguments increasingly problematised. Aquinas himself broke off the completion of his *Summa Theologiae* after an experience of apparent mystical vision, allegedly saying that his entire intellectual effort was not worth a fig by comparison with the overwhelming but ineffable insight which had been momentarily accorded him. Anselm, one can recall, found that his own attempt to think about the ontological argument persistently distracted him from reciting the liturgy. Perhaps the alternative to such intellectual distraction and disturbing rational analysis was indeed silence. Or just listening to the music.

Canterbury cluster

We can now reconsider the second question that intrigued me, and at least touch upon a standard topic in the history of music: the emergence of a form of liturgical polyphony, often focussed on the now celebrated compositions of Leonin and Perotin at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris around 1150 to 1250. I want to suggest an ambivalent relationship between

polyphony and the development during the same decades of the Scholastic modes of thought in the new institution of the university in Paris. Let us however consider Canterbury first.

One of the earliest instances of a recognisably 'Scholastic' mode of argumentation was Lanfranc's contribution to the debates over Berenger's views on the Eucharist, in his *De corpore et sanguine domini*. Moreover, in his commentary on the letters of Paul, probably the earliest manuscript of which is still in the Cathedral library (ADD MS 172), Lanfranc in effect reformulated passages in Paul's writings to construct from them typically syllogistic arguments. Margaret Gibson offers some examples in her *Lanfranc of Bec* (1978, pp. 55f). Anselm's ontological argument could also be regarded as a proto-Scholastic commentary upon the logical implications of that single verse in Psalm 13, 'The fool has said in his heart that there is no God'.

In the exchange of letters between Lanfranc and Anselm, considered earlier, the question of how far a reliance upon the Fathers or even upon the biblical text itself was necessary for a theological argument soon segued into the rather different issue of how far a biblical passage can itself be treated as the logical premise for a Scholastic argument. Which is almost how Abelard, Peter Lombard, and Aquinas will later cite biblical verses among the authorities to be considered for or against a *quaestio* being debated. The 'Alexandrian' mode of commenting upon the biblical text which we noted earlier may have continued to shape the arrangement of selectively interpreted biblical texts as the foundation for liturgical offices but those texts themselves were being increasingly subjected to a significantly different approach.

Some aspects of this paradigm shift are treated in Jean Leclercq's classic study *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (1957, ET 1978) which suggests that what Leclercq calls 'monastic theology' was intrinsically in contention with the new 'university' approaches and practices. The differences can be indicated by assembling several passages from Leclercq's book.

He cites (p. 250) Peter Cantor claiming that the scholastics have 'so little respect for God's Word that they treat it as if it were just any one of the liberal arts or even a mechanical art (*ac si ars liberalis esset vel mecanica* [i.e. servile])'. He quotes (p. 243) Philip of Harvengt : 'in the cloister . . the just man submits to the divine will, devotes himself to hymns, prayers, silence, tears and reading. . . Blessed, it is written, is he whom you instruct, Lord, he to whom you teach your law. And again it is said: I shall listen to what the Lord my God says within me.' Leclercq invokes Saint Bernard: 'This sacrament is great; it must be venerated, not scrutinised' (p. 252) and 'the reasoning of faith should not be the object of petty human rationalisations' (p. 128). Leclercq quotes two passages from Saint Bernard:

> As for us, in the commentary of mystical and sacred words, let us proceed with caution and simplicity. Let us model ourselves on Scripture which expresses the wisdom hidden in mystery in our own words: when Scripture portrays God for us it suggests him in terms of our own feelings. The invisible and hidden realities of God which are of such great price are rendered accessible to human minds, vessels, as it were, of little worth, by means of comparisons taken from the reality we know through our senses. Let us also adopt the usage of this chaste language. (p. 246)
>
> It is not disputation, it is sanctity which comprehends if the incomprehensible can, after a certain fashion, be understood at all. And what is this fashion? If you are a Saint, you have already understood, you know; if you are not, become one and you will learn through your own experience. (p. 137)

Other writers on this theme are sympathetically summarised. William of Saint James of Liege complained of 'these innovators who apply to faith the yardstick of reason' and who are turning Saint Anselm's formula upside down to 'make faith derive from intelligence rather than intelligence from faith' (p. 258). Evragius's saying is valid at any period: 'if you are a theologian you will pray in truth, and if you pray in truth, you are a theologian.' Baldwin of Ford often describes his attitude in the presence of the Eucharist by these two words: *stupor et admiratio,* he is surprised, rapt, as in an ecstasy… He never grows accustomed to the sublime… His wonder never diminishes… We are admiring and astounded, *admirantes et stupentes* . Rupert [of Deutz]: 'the Lord is a more effective teacher than all the others. I myself have had several fathers in the scholarly disciplines. But I must affirm that a visitation from the All High is of greater value than ten of their type' (p. 264).

Two clinching quotations are again from St Bernard: 'We search in a worthier manner, we discover with greater facility through prayer than through disputation (*orando quam disputando*)' (p. 262) and Bernard himself quoting Jerome [Letter 89, 2]: 'the work of a monk is to weep, not to teach'. (p. 256)

Finally, Leclercq claims (p. 260) that : 'an outstanding example of the progress that monastic theology is capable of instigating is found in the treatise composed by Eadmer, a disciple of Saint Anselm, on the subject of the conception of the virgin'. Leclercq speaks of Eadmer as an 'eminent representive of this Benedictine theology and [of] the profundity of his insight on the subject of the Immaculate Conception'. Leclercq further claims that Eadmer 'often invokes "higher reasons", that is to say "the heavenly point of view" which is none other than "God's point of view" on Mary … Eadmer doesn't rely upon the classic Marian texts to be found in Scripture and doesn't expressly quote any of the patristic authorities'.

According to Leclercq (citing a study by G. Geenan), Eadmer 'reflected and meditated on the liturgical cult. He contemplated the object of this liturgical worship in order to grasp its true dogmatic meaning . . It is Eadmer's doctrine which triumphed on December 8, 1854' (pp. 272-4). The reference here is to the papal declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which was however partly based upon the false attribution of the authorship of Eadmer's treatise to Saint Anselm himself, who had by then been designated a Doctor of the Church. In fact, Anselm's own position on the Immaculate Conception was explicitly opposed, on logical grounds, to that of Eadmer. Nevertheless Eadmer's treatise had frequently been mistakenly included among the manuscripts of Anselm's works.

Leclercq's account of Eadmer's procedure in his treatise indicates a critical variant on Anselm's own practice of meditating upon a verse from the Psalms and elaborating its possible implications without reference to the traditional patristic authorities or even the rest of Scripture. Instead, Eadmer extrapolates from the liturgical texts as incorporated into the Marian feast-days, even though such texts were often derived from dubious misapplications of scriptural texts. In an effectively circular argument, Eadmer then cites the popular devotion to those feasts as confirmation of the doctrinal validity of the beliefs extrapolated from those texts. As Leclercq recognises, following Geeson (p. 274, & note 141):

> It is true that the liturgical celebration of the conception of Our Lady in Eadmer's milieu and time did not necessarily imply that her conception had been immaculate . . Thus the liturgy of the church and the sense of the faith are the two great sources of Eadmer's doctrine. The monk who had meditated and contemplated the teaching of the liturgy found in it the sense it suggested to him. And he tried to develop and give currency to the theology that it possessed in actuality.

By contrast with Anselm's own argument in *De conceptione Virginali*, Eadmer's is more a devotional 'meditation' than a theological argument (see the French edition by Dom B. del Marmol, 1923, p. 13f) though clearly Anselm's own innovative 'prayers and meditations' were themselves a form of what Leclercq would characterise as 'monastic' theology.

Osbern

Let me here introduce another Canterbury contemporary of Lanfranc, Anselm, and Eadmer. Osbern 'of Canterbury' or 'of Dover' wrote several saints' lives and was also known as a composer of liturgical music, though none of his musical work seems to have survived. A similar figure, Goscelyn, was mainly associated with Saint Augustine's Abbey and again his saints' lives have survived but nothing of his music. William of Malmesbury says of Osbern: 'in our time he was second to none as a writer and

certainly without question the first of all in *musica*' (*nulli nostro tempore stilo secundus, musica certe omnium sine controversia primus*).

Osbern had been a child oblate and choirboy at Christ Church but after an unspecified misdemeanour he was sent by Lanfranc to Anselm at Bec for some remedial counselling. There is a rather touching letter from Anselm (Ep. 39) to Lanfranc reassuring him that Osbern was flourishing but also getting fat. After Osbern had returned to Christ Church, probably around 1080, he became a senior figure in the monastic community and as praelector was responsible for overseeing both the liturgical offices and the library. He composed an Office for Saint Gregory and perhaps one for Saint Alphege but neither is extant. He may have died around 1095, shortly after Anselm had succeeded Lanfranc as Archbishop in 1093.

However, a treatise on music has survived which was edited as *De vocum consonantiis ac De re musica Osberni Cantuariensis* (Bibl. Bodl. Rawl C 270, fol i - v) and is almost certainly attributable to Osbern. It opens with a doggerel poem rather playfully commenting upon the relationship between musical theory and liturgical practice:

ars est iam utillima
a philosphis composita
ars est vocata Musica
cantus totius domina

but concludes:

musica non est utilis
nec in cantu laudabilis
nec quisquam probus clericus
debere esse musicus

The most influential writer on music throughout the mediaeval period was the late classical author Boethius (c. 477–524) who maintained a strict distinction between *musica* as a subject in the humanities curriculum, the Quadrivium, to be studied alongside mathematics and astronomy, and on the other hand the merely practical crafts of musical performance. Boethius in his *De institutione musica* wrote:

> every art and every discipline has by nature a more honourable character than a handicraft which is produced by the hand and labour of a craftsman… How much more admirable then is the science of music in apprehending by reason than in accomplishing by work and deed… He is a musician who has absorbed the science of singing by careful reflection, not by the servitude of work but by the rule of contemplation.

This firm dichotomy between *musicus* and *cantor* was to some extent modified in the writings of Guido of Arezzo (c. 990–1050?), and Osbern follows Arezzo rather than Boethius, not surprisingly since Osbern was both in charge of the day-to-day practice of liturgical music and was here writing his own introductory treatise on music theory.

In a further rhyming section of the manuscript Osbern outlines the basics of musical terminology, explaining words such as diatesseron, diapente, ditonus, semitonus, and the mediaeval terms for what we now call a perfect fourth, major third, and so on. He also provides in prose a brief history of music, from its legendary origins and the alleged discoveries of Pythagoras, and finally offers a more complex section on musical modes which is largely a compressed version of Arezzo's own account.

The only edition of Osbern's treatise, by Joseph Smits van Waesberghe (1979), makes it clear that almost all of this section is directly derived from Arezzo's basic treatise *Micrologus*, and Carol J. Williams has argued (in a paper at a conference in 2015) that Osbern shows no awareness of Arezzo's later work, for example the *Regulae rhythmicae*, which has been claimed as crucially influential in the development of musical notation and therefore, on some accounts, the emergence of polyphony. The 1170 catalogue of the Christ Church library lists Osbern's own treatise alongside two copies of *Boethius musica*, a defective copy of Arezzo's *Micrologus* and two other works by Arezzo listed simply as *musica* and *expositio in musicam.*

The familiar story (now disputed) is that Arezzo initiated the use of horizontal lines to construct what has now become the familiar form of a music 'score' with 'stave lines' separated by spaces indicating fixed vertical intervals, and with calligraphic shapes ('notes') distributed in vertical arrangements and horizontal sequences on or between those lines so that their position indicates the pitch of the sound to be made by a singer. A further but distinct innovation was perhaps the use at the start of the stave lines of what we would now regard as clef markings.

Whether Arezzo also introduced bar markings is disputed but the shape of the 'notes' could indicate how long the sound was to last, a notion already familiar from, though different to, the differential vowel lengths in Latin words, whether long or short, and the use of accents to indicate emphases.

Crucially, in a once-standard account, Arezzo's new 'score' schema could replace the previous use of small marks placed directly over the syllables of a text, which had for centuries acted as indicative reminders of an already known melody rather than as signs of exact pitch. By contrast, in Arezzo's arrangement the text to be sung was written below the stave lines and each syllable of the text was aligned with the appropriate note(s) inscribed in the 'box' of staves above. Previously the written text itself with its notations directly constituted the 'music', whereas an Arezzo-type 'score' creates a disjuncture between the stave with music notes located on it and the verbal

text which is separately inscribed beneath it, a visual separation between the text and the sequence of notes.

Which was to have considerable consequences, not least for composers as well as copyists and scribes. When Benedict of Peterborough was described as writing 'both words and music' that may have meant only that he put small musical markings over the actual words of his text or the comment may indicate a notable and novel use of the new notation format.

Intriguingly, one separate brief passage in the manuscript which includes Osbern's treatise can be interpreted as an attempt to offer an improved version of traditional notation marks in a revised form but explicitly without Arezzo's use of ruled lines and interval spaces (*sine respectu regulae vel spatii*). This fragmentary passage provides a limited number of different graphic signs or sigla with specifically defined functions, which are still to be placed directly over the '*voces*' of the text to be sung. The passage is reproduced in partial facsimile in the published edition of Osbern's treatise with markings as transcribed by Smits van Waesberghe (p. 25). Using here some sigla available in Word, an explanatory translation might be somewhat as follows:

> Six consonances are indicated by which, without reference to the rulings or spaces, different things are sung in different ways. A singer understands the different pitches by specific visible signs as follows (*Si quisque voces earum visibiliter intelligit, his proprias notas imponat, hoc modo*) . . : An **✻** over a syllable means that this is the given pitch; the sign **τ** over a syllable means that the pitch should go higher than the preceding by a major third; a **ŋ** would indicate singing a fifth below the previous syllable, and **ſ** indicates to go a fifth above, while **Ч** indicates that the previous pitch should be maintained.

This limited number of defined graphic marks could thereby specify the restricted range of liturgically permissible consecutive *alterations* of pitch since each instruction is not itself a 'note' but an instruction to sing higher or lower by a certain fixed interval. Once the Cantor had sung the initial 'tonus' a singer could easily follow each subsequent visible mark to implement the next *relative* change of pitch, with no need for stave lines or clef. The explicit reference to this system working 'without regard to rules or spaces' (*sine respectu regulae vel spatii*) suggests an awareness of Arezzo's innovation and also an intention to provide a simpler and more standardisable set of sigla than the highly variable pre-Arezzo superscript notations which could be variously interpreted as simply indicating a more or less estimated rise or fall of pitch.

Frustratingly, even though a snippet of liturgical text is included in the manuscript to illustrate the system, any sigla on that short text are not recorded in the 1979 edition. Smits van Waesberghe argued on various grounds that this isolated passage was not in fact attributable to Osbern

himself but was a later addition to his treatise and was therefore not Osbern's own notation.

Nevertheless, Osbern's treatise was written to teach his Canterbury pupils and it was presumably one such pupil who included the additional passage and implicitly credited it to Osbern. That his teaching of music had a lasting influence in Christ Church may be indicated by an exceptional manuscript of Boethius plausibly datable from the 1120s, and not referenced by Smits van Waesberghe. According to recent research, this Canterbury manuscript (now CUL MS Ii.3.12) comprises the most sophisticated surviving attempt to offer a complete and complex diagrammatisation of Boethius's *De Arithmetica* and *De Musica* and of the systematic relations between the two treatises.

Certainly, such an impressive account of Boethius produced at Canterbury Christ Church in the generation after Osbern's death may be a tribute to the continuing local influence of his teaching. In addition, another Canterbury manuscript indicates an attempt to set to music Boethius's own poems in the *Consolation Of Philosophy* (CUL Gg.5.35). All this activity suggests that, in a spirit of collaboration between *musicus* and *cantor*, the early 12th-century Canterbury monastic choir may have been as 'advanced' in their musical practice as that in the almost contemporary Notre Dame cathedral of Leonin's generation.

However, since Osbern's own musical compositions are not known we have no way of checking if the suggested notation included in the manuscript of his treatise was ever utilised in the monastery to make copies of his own liturgical compositions. It is tempting to speculate that this local version of music notation might have survived superscribed on texts written at Canterbury itself but the unusual sigla were not recognised as such by later copyists. And, to go beyond speculation into a pleasing fantasy, we might consider Osbern's friendship with Anselm, and wonder whether Osbern ever tried to add music notation to Anselm's own 'prayers and meditations'.

Might an early Canterbury manuscript of Anselm's prayers have once included those unusual musical sigla attributed to Osbern? Certainly, Eadmer as the first editor of Anselm's works would have known his colleague Osbern's treatise.

However, my main reason for discussing Osbern is to highlight the conjuncture at Canterbury, as elsewhere, of both new attempts to compose and transmit music and the early emergence in the same short period of what became modes of 'Scholastic' philosophising, independent of previous patristic modes and even sometimes any reliance upon the authority of the divine text itself. Leclercq's account of a potential fissure is already emergent in miniature in this cluster of figures at Christ Church Canterbury.

*

We can return to claims about Arezzo and polyphony. According to a once-standard account, the importance of Arezzo's later work was that his system of '*regulae [et] spatii*' replaced what had been the traditional procedure for learning liturgical music mainly through memorisation, since supposedly the only previous way to learn a piece of music without a written score had been to hear it sung by someone already familiar with it and to faithfully repeat their rendition. Even with the earlier forms of musical notation directly on the text, but without precise indications of pitch, what was transmitted would be highly variable performances. However, the clef and stave combination attributed to Arezzo enabled a form of transcription from which singers could learn any piece of music directly from a 'score', practising what we now call sight-reading. Such a score could reproduce the intended sounds more exactly than any particular singer's vocal performance. It has also been argued that this format enabled a new method of composition which then encouraged the development of advanced polyphony.

Some earlier instances of 'spontaneous' polyphony, known from at least the eighth century, could have been generated simply by the make-up of the average monastic choir, insofar as this encompassed all the members of the community, including the child oblates or pupils from an attached school. The different ranges of voices provided an obvious potential for differential but partly harmonised musical performance. In any case, since some members of the monastic community would have had only minimal musical talent or competence while others may have been capable of considerable musical accomplishment, it is no surprise that a division in functions could also develop between a basic accompanying vocalised drone and more complex melodic singing over and above the drone sound. Moreover, when music was memorised and notation minimal, there would have been an almost inevitable tendency for some within a daily practising choir to sing not necessarily in full consonance with other singers, and a certain overlapping both of phrasing and of pitch may well have been a constant and tolerated or even perhaps pleasing and impromptu aspect of the daily liturgical performance.

The emergence of Arezzo's format, which made music more exactly recorded and learned, if not actually performed, from written copies, arguably reinforced or exploited the potential for deliberate polyphonic 'composition'. In particular, a set or 'box' of different stave lines could indicate separate score segments for singers with different pitch ranges, matched to a corresponding section of text. Or two different melodies could be visually presented to be sung simultaeously and in harmony. Or an arrangement of different texts to be sung to different melodies could be clearly presented even on a single page.

Moreover, a section, perhaps just a few bars, of a written score might be treated as a 'building block' for further composing, enabling a selectied sequence of notes to be not simply copied but inverted or reversed, vertically or horizontally, or both. What we might call a 'post-Arezzo' composition could be created from a written note sequence to be almost mechanically shuffled, repeated, or varied.

Arezzo's innovation raised again the issue of relations between *musica* as theory and actual practice, including the new compositional and performance possibilities. In particular, for some historians, there was an interaction between the teaching of post-Arezzo *musica* in the university system of the 12th century and the practice of polyphony in the work of Leonin and Perotin at Notre Dame cathedral during the same decades.

Extensive scholarly debates have included attempts to align different phases in music 'theory' with stages in the development of polyphony, and such topics as the continuing role of 'improvisation', contested notions of 'measured music', the personal relations between Leonin and the theologians of the community of Saint Victor of which he became a member, whether Perotin was responsible for transcribing Leonin's music into an Arezzo-derived format, and even whether the Notre Dame choir continued to learn and rehearse without any actual use of the famous *Magnus Liber organi* with its beautifully presented liturgical music scores. And so on.

However, in most of these scholarly investigations almost the sole focus of interest is the music, often reproduced as evidence in a modern score format and notation, and though music examples usually include some parts of a text to which the music was set, it is rare for much attention to be paid to how that specific text might itself shape the music being analysed. A modern score creates a clear visual separation between score and text which can encourage a relative indifference to the text while concentrating upon the sequence of notes.

Treitler

One exception to this musicological consensus is an important article by Leo Treitler, 'The "Unwritten" and "Written Transmission" of Medieval Chant and the Start-Up of Musical Notation' (*The Journal of Musicology* , Spring, 1992, Vol. 10, 2 pp. 131- 191), partly because, unlike many others, he recognises that the standard model of 'composition' and 'transmission' can be misleading.

> . . we must try to think ourselves outside of our own habits of musical thought and practice—no small task. The impediment is our continued dependence on the construction of the institution of music that formed in the early years of the Romantic era around the idea of works as texts given notational specification in scores and given acoustical explication in performance events that comply with the specifications of the score. Despite the highly specific historical context and limited reference of

> this scheme it tends now to function in all fields of musical scholarship except for ethnomusicology—i.e. in music history, theory/analysis, and music esthetics—as the representation of the way music *is*. Subordinating medieval material to these conceptions and expectations has meant evaluating early medieval notational material according to the measure in which it meets the standard of precision in a prescriptive denotation; envisioning performance in a scriptless musical world in terms of two satellite conceptions of the Romantic work concept: either as the reproduction of an autonomous "text" that has been deposited in all its completeness in "memory," as a written text would be deposited in a book; or as an improvisation produced through the free exercise of the musical fantasy . . .

He adds (my empases):

> "Written transmission" presupposes an object, something transmittable. Our most familiar image for this idea is that of someone copying a text from a model, and that is reflected in the habit of saying that a manuscript was *copied* at such and such a time and place, even if our evidence allows us to say only that it was *written* then and there. The idea of something transmittable is still more problematic in the case of "unwritten transmission." If it is a well-known hymn that is being transmitted note-for-note through a stable performance tradition, then the formulation seems perfectly apt. But if it is a trope or an organum melody that we have every reason to think was *reconstructed or extemporized in performance*, then the object has not been *transmitted* through performance, it has been *realized* in performance. . . What is more, the phrase "unwritten transmission" tends from the first to suggest the idea of performing from a mental repository (= "memory") of fixed melodies, as the only respectable alternative to an idea of undisciplined improvisation . . .

His own controversial position can only be inadequately summarised here:

> from the very beginning of a written tradition reading, remembering, and extemporizing were continuous acts; they were mutually supportive and interdependent.

For Treitler, the live performance was shaped on each occasion by the actual enunciation of the specific texts being sung, and it was the shape of the voicing of that text to be intelligible which was the primary influence upon the chant as performed.

Though Treitler does not make the comparisons, his argument suggests affinities with the way in which a jazz singer performs a classic blues, being faithful to the received lyrics while musically modifying every phrasing. I once heard the great innovative saxophonist Sonny Rollins respond to a hostile jeering shout "Now play *Cherokee* !!" by instantly transposing and reversing the entire familiar piece. I'm told that the musical annotations on

a Hebrew synagogue text often indicate not individual notes but rather point to clusters of familiar traditional melodies, which an amateur synagogue choir simply know by heart and can variously re-composite. Treitler argues:

> A medieval liturgical chant is first and foremost to be understood as the presentation in melody of an ecclesiastical verbal text. The primary task of melody in chant is the presentation of language in such a way as to project its sound structure and meaning with maximum distinctness, while at the same time being faithful to principles of melodic syntax and grammar that assure coherence of idiom and genre and to the constraints of performance practice in the liturgical situation (essentially a matter of who is to sing what, and in what order). The analysis of chant begins with the description of the way these tasks and obligations are discharged.
>
> In giving priority of place . . to the linkages between music and language, I explicitly take exception to the treatment of chant melodies as autonomous musical works in the sense of the work-aesthetic of early Romanticism. The primary melodic units . . are the settings of the syllables of language.
>
> . . think of such idioms being internalized non-verbally by singers who practice them daily and have been doing so since childhood. Perhaps most important and difficult is for us to think that functions of concrete melodic formulas would have been known as immanent qualities, as much so as their actual note contents, that the figure G-F-E-F-G, for example, would have been activated in the singer's memory only as he was coming to sing the last syllable of a clause that is syntactically complete but not the end of a sentence.

I have outlined Treitler's position at some length, partly because I find it a highly persuasive account, and, as it were, the obverse of my own questions about what the singing monks were actually doing and why. And also because, if accepted, it raises a question for me concerning the text and its treatment in polyphony.

Given Treitler's case for the crucial importance of the intelligibility of the liturgical text, why in so much later mediaeval polyphony is the text so patently subordinate to the music and frequently becomes deliberately indecipherable to the listener? Yet whether the words set to music are 'legible' or not to a listener seems a wholly marginal consideration for many musicologists concerned with this period. Whereas I am particularly interested in some possible relations between 'polyphonic composition' and the impact of scholasticism upon the status of the texts being set to such music.

Consider again the complaint made in the early 14th century by Jacques of Liege, in his *Speculum musicae*, partly quoted earlier:

> In a certain company in which some able singers and judicious laymen were assembled, and where modern motets in the modern manner and some older ones were sung, I observed that even the laymen were better pleased with the ancient motets in the ancient manner than with the new. And even if the new manner pleased when it was a novelty, it does so no longer, but begins to displease many. So let the ancient music and the ancient manner of singing be brought back to their native land; let them come back into use; that the rational art once more flourish. It has been in exile, along with the corresponding method of singing, as if violently cast out from the Fellowship of singers, but violence should not be perpetual. Wherein does this studied lasciviousness in singing so greatly please, by which, as some think, the words are lost, the harmony of consonances is diminished, the value of the notes is changed, perfection is brought low, imperfection is exalted, and measure is confounded? In a great company of judicious men, when motets in the modern manner were being sung, I observed that the question was asked, what language such singers were using, whether Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or some other, because it could not be made out what they were saying. Thus, although the moderns compose good and beautiful texts for their songs, they lose by their manner of singing, since they are not understood.

Compare this with John of Salisbury writing about his time in Paris, including attending Notre Dame a century or so earlier :

> Bad taste has, however, degraded even religious worship, bringing into the presence of God, into the recesses of the sanctuary a kind of luxurious and lascivious singing, full of ostentation, which with feminine modulation astonishes and enervates the souls of the hearers. When you hear the soft harmonies of the various singers, some taking high and others low parts, some singing in advance, some following in the rear, others with pauses and interludes, you would think yourself listening to a concert of sirens rather than men, and wonder at the powers of voices … whatever is most tuneful among birds, could not match it. Such is the facility of running up and down the scale; so wonderful the shortening or multiplying of notes, the repetition of the phrases, or their emphatic utterance: the treble and shrill notes are so mingled with tenor and bass, that the ears lost their power of judging. When this goes to excess it is more fitted to excite desire than devotion; but if it is kept in the limits of moderation, it drives away care from the

soul and the solicitudes of life, confers joy and peace and exultation in God, and transports the soul to the society of angels.

scholastic scrutiny

There are various possible relations between comprehensibility, polyphony, and the 'score' format. Trying, for example, to designate the simultaneous singing of two different sequence of words directly notated by 'pre-Arezzo' sigla might be attempted by designing a page-layout of parallel or consecutive columns of notated text, but that would probably generate considerable confusion. Whereas a 'post-Arezzo' composer using a 'score' format could, as suggested earlier, quite readily treat a sequence or selected 'box' of written music notes as a 'building block' in an almost cut-and-paste variation of Lego construction, by simply repeating them together as a unit, by reversing the note order, layering one set of notes onto another, or arranging them on parallel staves to be sung simultaneously.

Crucially, however, a sequence of words comprising a text cannot be treated in the same way. Reversing a pattern of notes cannot be matched by similarly reversing a sequence of words without modifying or destroying the sense of the text, while singing two or more different texts at the same time, or simply a-synchronously overlapping the repeated words of a single text, risks the same effect as two people talking at the same time and rendering what each of them says aurally 'illegible' or incomprehensible.

Assembling and re-arranging variations of a chosen 'box' of notes may be similar to designing patterns of images or illuminated initials on a manuscript page. But the matching of a text to that organisation of notes may require finding or re-writing complementary texts to fit the order and variations of the note sequences, a reversal of the priorities as summarised by Treitler. Such a procedure would clearly make the music paramount and the comprehensibility of the text(s) subordinate. The salient issue for me is that if the words were no longer heard clearly enough for the meaning of those words to be conveyed by singing them, what was the point in setting the words to music in that way?

Some half-thoughts can be suggested. While the elaboration of more complex polyphonic compositions for the liturgical texts may perhaps (as some suggest) have provided increased time, though still relatively fleeting, for enhanced spiritual reflection by those listening to the more accomplished singers among the cathedral or monastic clergy, the effect of these newer modes of extended and elaborated music may well have been, on the contrary, to take attention away from the words being sung and even deliberately to obfuscate the sense of those words. Which is were one possible overlap with scholasticism occurs.

Once the familiar doctrinal formulations and even the articulation of core theological positions were increasingly subject to systematic scholastic scrutiny, and the new treatises of organised *questiones* were copied in the

scriptorium and read in the cloister no longer provided the traditional forms of rich many-layered interpretation and association but offered instead critical analysis and disputation, then listening to powerfully engaging music in the choir may have provided a reassuring relief, a comforting affirmation, even a kind of counter-scholastic response and repudiation. Clearly, the intention of elaborating a polyphonic and polysemic text was not to dwell upon, still less to resolve, lurking scholastic dilemmas, but rather to re-affirm doctrinal quasi-propositions primarily in a mode of affective devotion.

One did not particularly want to recall Aquinas's scepticism about angelic choirs while singing *Gloria in excelsis deo*. Leclercq quotes Saint Bernard: 'When Scripture portrays God for us it suggests him in terms of our own feelings.' Not as a scholastic *quaestio*. The more powerful and impactful affective response prompted by polyphonic music could allow its performance to reinforce those 'feelings' and effectively muffle the scholastic 'questions'.

Polyphonic singing of the liturgy could invite a primarily emotional engagement in which the words being sung are accorded far less attention than the emotional attractions and intensities of the music itself. Which may, I am suggesting, have been a more less conscious reaction to the new university 'Scholasticism'. Those responses may be seen as a defence against the ongoing erosion of the old unproblematical affirmation or acquiescence in traditional and deeply familiar doctrinal formulations.

Polyphonic music enabled composers, performers and listeners to displace attention from the liturgical and doctrinal texts which were vulnerable to increasing critical scrutiny. Even if one wanted to register what was being said or sung, the meaning or sense of the text could be displaced by an intensity of affectivity. Perhaps note, very briefly, that more general later developments were eventually to include the 'Devotio moderna', the fervent saying of the rosary, sorrowful following of the stations of the cross, the *Imitation of Christ*, and a heart-felt focus on vividly imagining and vicariously experiencing the sufferings of virgin mother and divine son, all arguably as ways of avoiding any engagement with the problematic substance of theology or traditional doctrine.

LeClercq's contrast between scholastic and monastic theology might itself be very schematically mapped onto a core difference between text and music as intertwined within the liturgy, in which choral music prompts shared affirmation, celebration, emotional assent, humility, confession, 'feelings', whereas a 'Scholastic' text offers statement, proposition, argument, analytical understanding, disputation, disagreement. Text without music can reflect and query, music without text offers wordless imagination and emotional identification. Noticeably, it was the new mendicant preaching orders, the Dominican and to a lesser extent the Franciscan friars, who contributed most to the growth of Scholastic analysis and the new pedagogy, while the long established Benedictine and other traditional

monastic orders contributed comparatively little intellectual innovation, though increasing numbers even of English Benedictine monks were assigned to attend university, including at Canterbury's own Christ Church college in Oxford.

Whether Canterbury enthusiastically adopted or largely ignored polyphonic music in the two centuries after Anselm, Eadmer, and Osbern remains opaque in the absence of its full musical repertoire, though some sad fragments of polyphony survive in the Cathedral archive and Canterbury manuscripts of polyphony made their way not only to Oxford and Cambridge college libraries but even to Italy.

One element in the growth of polyphony was increasing professionalisation and in the Paris Notre Dame cathedral choir we have named composers, archived scores, attributed compositions, the prime material for historical musicology. The two figures Leonin and Perotin are sometimes conflated and sometimes distinguished, with Perotin presented as revising in some improved fashion the work of Leonin. In particular, Leonin characteristically composed for two voices whereas Perotin took the extra step of composing in four or even more voices. From there the route to Striggio or *Spem in alium* was arguably a matter of stretching further what was feasible thanks to the new notational forms. Perotin perhaps even explored a more radical step, by sometimes treating the text not even as words but simply as material sounds, while some works seem influenced by inquiries into the very nature of language itself, a late scholastic preoccupation revived in some 20th-century music developments. Ironically, perhaps, one vigorous 13th century Scholastic debate was indirectly relevant to the emotional impacts of polyphony. Various commentaries on Book VIII of Aristotle's unfinished *Politics*, concerning 'passions' as given specific expression in music, generated a scholastically systematic analysis of at least eleven different 'passions'. Unfortunately, Aquinas's own unfinished commentary on Aristotle's text never reached Book VIII.

However, leaving Paris to its own story (see Ian P. Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Mediaeval Paris,* 2012) I want to return to Canterbury and consider three figures differently associated with the cathedral and with the aspects of polyphony I have been sketching. As a prelude, I offer an instance of a text-based chant concerned with clearly articulating a doctrinal position, alongside an extraordinary use of quasi-polyphony in a composition which renders even the words of the very Creed itself gradually more and more incomprehensible. First, Aquinas:

Adoro te devote, latens Deitas, *quae sub his figuris vere latitas*: *tibi se cor meum totum subiicit*, *quia te contemplans totum deficit*.	O God hid indeed, devoutly I adore thee who truly art within the forms before me to thee my heart I bow with bended knee as failing quite in contemplating thee

Visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur,	sight touch and taste in thee are each deceivèd
Sed auditu solo tuto creditur.	The ear alone most safely is believèd
Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius;	I believe all the son of God has spoken
Nil hoc verbo veritátis verius.	Than truth's own word there is no truer token
In cruce latebat sola Deitas,	God only on the cross lay hid from view
At hic latet simul et Humanitas,	but here lies hid at once the manhood too
Ambo tamen credens atque confitens,	and I in both professing my belief
Peto quod petivit latro pœnitens.	make the same prayer as the repentant thief . .

And here is the utterly familiar text of Robert Wylkynson's 15th century 'round' in the Eton Choirbook, the canon-like *Jesus autem transiens* in which the twelve apostles successively join in singing the core statements of the *Credo* in such a way that the accumulating layering of each voice upon the preceding ones renders the continuing multiple overlapping but verbally unsynchronised statements of this central doctrinal affirmation increasingly indecipherable.

Jesus autem transiens
[Petrus]Credo in Deum Patrem omnipotentem, Creatorem caeli el terrae.
[Andreas] Et in Iesum Christum, Filium eius unicum, Dominum nostrum,
[Jacobus] Qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto, natus ex Maria Virgine,
[Johannes] passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus, mortuus, et sepultus,
[Thomas] descendit ad inferna, tertia die resurrexit a mortuis,
[Jacobus minor] ascendit ad caelos, sedet ad dexteram Dei Patris omnipotentis,
[Philippusj inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos.
[Bartolomaeus] Credo in Spiritum Sanctum,
[Maflhaeus] sanctam Ecclesiam catholicam, sanctorum communionem,
[Simon] remissionem peccatorum,
[Judas Thaddeus] carnis resurrectionem,
[Matthias] et vitam aeternam.
Amen.

But Jesus passing through the midst of them. [*repeated*].
[Peter] I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth . .
[Andrew] And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord . . ,
[James] Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary .,
[John] Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried . .
[Thomas] He descended into hell [Hades]; the third day He rose again from the dead . . ;
[James the less] He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand Of God the Father Almighty . . ;
[Philip] From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

[Bartholomew] I believe in the Holy Ghost;
[Matthew] The Holy Catholic Church; The communion of saints;
[Simon] The forgiveness of sins;
[Judas Thaddeus] The resurrection of the body;
[Matthias] And the life everlasting.
Amen.

Dunstable

Three composers connected in different ways to Canterbury cathedral can now provide instances of possible different kinds of composition and uses of music in relation to text. The three are Leonel Power, John Dunstable, and Thomas Tallis. There is some overlap in the lives and compositions of Power and Dunstable, and the attribution of some pieces between them is uncertain. Leonel or Lionel Power was probably born between 1370 and 1385 and died in 1445 while Dunstable was born around 1390 and died in 1453 or perhaps 1459. Power's association with Canterbury largely post-dates the single occasion involving Dunstable at Canterbury which I first want to consider.

In older English histories of music John Dunstable was patriotically claimed as the great innovator, even as the first 'composer'. For example, this chauvinist passage is in a chapter entitled ' John Dunstable solves the problem of composition' in the once esteemed *History Of English Music,* by Henry Davy published in 1921:

> On the Continent barbarous cacophony was still being perpetrated. We were given practical experience at the International Musical Societies Paris Congress in June 1914; a number of 12th to 15th century pieces were sung in the Sainte Chappelle, and more unpleasantly discordant combinations are inconceivable. The 'Motez' of the French composers, two songs simultaneously sung in consecutive fifths, with a third voice repeating two or three words, are hideous as music . . .
>
> For three or four centuries musicians apparently had a dim perception that some hitherto unknown possibilities lay dormant in the art of sound; they could not find out exactly what to do. They had the mathematical speculations of Boethius, the plainsong of the church ritual, and the tunes (whatever they may have been) sung by the minstrels; how to fuse these various elements into a plastic art was the problem they could not solve.
>
> To one man only, to John of Fornsete in the scriptorium of Reading Abbey came the light of inspiration, and but for one moment; so far as we know, not a piece endurable by modern ears existed before 1400, or ever did exist, save and except only '*Summer is i-cumen in*'. But now at last the genius of John Dunstable had thrown back the veil, and musicians found before them a vast and fertile region, waiting only the cultivator's

hand. Dunstable was thus the originator of the whole art of composition, and is in one sense the most important figure in the whole range of musical history.

A recent work, *Angel Song* by Lisa Colton (2019), has effectively demolished this whole mode of musical historiography and in the process considerably rectified the traditional account of Dunstable, but his overall career is not my concern here. Dunstable was a lay professional attached to the court chapel or choir of the Duke of Bedford, while he was Regent in France for his brother Henry V. Dunstable's only known connection with Canterbury cathedral was an event in 1416. Thomas Elmham, the monk historian of St Augustine's Abbey, tells us that two motets composed by Dunstable were performed at Canterbury Cathedral on 21st August 1416 when Henry V and the Emperor Sigismund attended a ceremony celebrating the 'Treaty of Canterbury' and their alliance against France. It is not clear whether Christ Church monks even took part in the performance but a framentary manuscript of a composition sung on that occasion remains in the cathedral archive and may date from shortly after. The 1416 occasion was not itself a liturgical feast-day, but a day to be recorded in history and celebrated as magnificently as possible.

Nevertheless, both pieces performed at the Canterbury celebration were probably originally composed for specific liturgical feasts. One composition by Dunstable performed on the 1416 occasion was *Preco praeheminencie*. The manuscript in the cathedral archive is in a somewhat distressed state, but other extant manuscripts give complementary versions of the work (I choose that word deliberately). Three texts are sung simultaneously. Two of them are as follows:

Preco preheminencie principi precessitl;
salus sapiencie subito successit;
preco penitenciam prius predicavitl;
princeps per potenciam peccam purgavit;
legislator latuit languidis largitus,
precursor[que] patuit prudens et peritus;
lympha lavit liquida lubricam luentem;
turba tinctam turbida timet et tergentem;
missus ministerium magni mandatoris
mutat in mysterium modi melioris.
Pax paterna panditur plebi penitenti;
Filius dum funditur flumine fluenti
descendit divinitus donum deitatis;
particeps Paraclitus princeps pietatis
singulare sequitur signum sanctitatis;
tribus hiis tribuitur tronus Trinitatis.
Cessat circumfusio cella celsitatis;

renovat renacio requiem renatis;
premebatur patria primitus penalis;
renatos ne regia recipit regalis.

and

Precursor premittitur populum parare;
nebulosis nititur nova nunciare;
duritatem domuit dcserti decanter;
predicando profuit pluribus prudenter;
carceris custodia captus coartatur;
timens tantis talia tyrannus turbatur;
crudeli convivio caros convocavit;
saltans in salario sacro saciavit;
pars prima prcscinditur proceris proceri;
miserande mittitur merces rnulieri;
prcstent per presidium preces prccursoris
sequentis subsidium sancti Salvatoris.

I can gratefully quote the prose translation by David Howlett available with the Orlando Consort *Dunstable* CD (Metronome 1009, 1995). Howlett tries valiantly to indicate the insistent alliteration and over-the-top word-play of the Latin texts, and even without consulting the score one might try to imagine the overlapping performance of these two densely written texts. Text A he translates as:

> The preacher preceded the Prince of pre-eminence. Salvation suddenly succeeded sapience. The preacher preached penitence prior. The Prince purged peccadilloes through power. The large-hearted legislators lay low for the languid, and the precursor stood patient, prudent and practised; with liquid lymph he laved one suffering loss. The turbid throng is timid of one tinged and towelled. The service of sending of the great-sized specifier mutates into the mystery of an ameliorating mode. Paternal peace is spread for a penitent people. While the Son is flooded with flowing fluid the donation of deity divinely descends. The partner Paraclete, the Prince of piety, is sequent as a singular sign of sanctity. To these three is attributed the throne of the Trinity. Circumfusion ceases in the cell of celsitude. Rebirth renews rest for the reborn. The penal paternal land was primally pressed. The royal residence rightly receives the reborn.

Text B is translated by David Howlett as:

> The precursor is pre-sent to pre-pare the people. He tries to announce new things to the nebulous. He subdued the distress of the desert

decently. By preaching he was prudently profitable to plural persons. Captured he is constrained by the custody of the clink. Timid of such things the tyrant is troubled by too great things. To a dire dinner his dear ones he called together. Swirling in the soler on the sacred feast she satisfied him. The prime part of the pre-eminent is prescinded for the pre-eminent, presented as a present to the pitiful prostitute. May the prayers of the precursor take precedence through the presidium, a subsidy of the sequent saintly saviour.

This impressive attempt at translation nevertheless can't capture the full impact of the repetitions and variations of rhyme in the Latin of the texts and the fusion throughout of both a traditional 'English' poetic beat and the prosody of classical verse in measured feet. I defy anybody to unravel even the basic sense of these texts on a single rapid read-through, let alone when listening to both being sung or even spoken simultaneously.

By contrast, the third text consists of a single line: *inter natos mulierum non surrexit maior iohanne baptisa* ('among men born of women there has not risen up a greater man than John the Baptist'). However, if we consult a modern transcript of the score, we can see why the words even of that brief third text are also more or less unintelligible to anyone listening to a performance, since the syllables are so extended in the almost drone-like singing of them that, for example, the extended vowel *-a* of the word *natos* lasts as long in performance as the entire phrase sung simultaneously from text A *salus sapiencie subito successit preco penitenciam*..... Text C, sung only three times, thus lasts as long as the two much longer texts sung over it.

Yet it is text C which finally makes it clear what the entire multi-voiced and triple-texted composition concerns: the last two words of this long drawn-out third text are '*Johanne Baptista',* which is audible 3 times only, first at bar 70-90, at 127-35, and in the final 5 seconds at 160-65. Apart from that, it is perfectly possible for a listener to have been utterly baffled as to what these texts were saying or even referring to.

Partly because the elaborately compressed alliterative words of both the A and B texts themselves, even when deciphered on the page, are not immediately obvious as being specifically about John the Baptist, but also because when they are sung it is only possible to catch the specific words of either text if one listens determinedly to one voice at a time, allowing the other text to recede into aural space as only an accompaniment to the foregrounded dense alliteration of the other.

This might be attempted on consecutive listenings by alternating one's attention, but disentangling the sense on a first and single hearing of the multiply overlapping lines of the two texts sung together is gloriously impossible. I say gloriously because the piece offers a wonderfully skilful exhibition of expertise on the part both of the virtuoso performers and the composer. It would take at least a repeat performance for us to make out that text A is about the meeting of Jesus and his 'precursor' at the baptism

of the Christ, while text B recounts the fate of John the Baptist and his decapitation.

I am strongly tempted by the thought that Dunstable or some royal courtier would have quietly tipped off King Henry himself in advance as to what this extraordinary composition was 'about', and that at some point during the initial performance the English king would have casually murmured *sotto voce* to his continental imperial guest listening without a clue: "Of course, it's all about John the Baptist, don't you know."

Once the singers had concluded (the work takes about eight minutes), the assembled royalty would surely have signalled their appreciation by the fifteenth-century equivalent of applause and probably requested to hear it all over again, immediately. One can assume that the continental contingent included professional French court composers and that any "*Encore!*" uttered by them may well have been through gritted French teeth, as their own patrons glanced across with a clear and ominous signal: why can't you give us something as impressive as this? On one reading, the whole point of the composition was manifestly to celebrate and exhibit the supremacy of Dunstable's music in honour, ostensibly of John the Baptist, but most certainly of Dunstable's king, his own patron's brother.

The main characteristic of Dunstable's composition is certainly not to enable a 'meditation' upon the convoluted meanings of these densely overlapping texts but to demonstrate triumphantly the intricate virtuosity deployed in singing them simultaneously. What we are hearing in this instance is not primarily a celebration of John the Baptist but a demonstration of Dunstable's musical mastery. This is a *tour de force* for a professional career musician to display his skill.

Far from being written for a communal performance by the monks of Christ Church, whatever role they may perhaps have played in actually performing it or just dutifully attending the ceremony, this piece is primarily oriented to being listened to by a more or less passive and non-participating audience. It is not important whether the King or the royal retainers actually understand the words as they are being sung but only that they should applaud and reward the skill of the composer. One might say that the point of the exercise is precisely that the texts should *not* be comprehensible to the audience.

It is a relatively short step from such court compositions to those displays of virtuosity by composer and performer to be found in the later emergence of opera, where several texts might be sung simultaneously, in the form we now know as an aria. This element in Dunstable's deliberately ostentatious masterpiece marks an increasingly entrenched division between the amateur or average singer and the career performer, which also involved the professional composer, and eventually the professional musicologist.

Yet it should be remembered that the score of *Preco praeheminencie* was retained by the monks of Christ Church and perhaps they even attempted it on the next feast-day of John the Baptist. And though the named composer

Dunstable is given credit for the alleged impact upon continental Europe, one commentator has noted:

> In 1416 two major English contingents arrived [at the Council of Constance] with the bishops of Lichfield and Norwich. Two weeks earlier they had stopped at Cologne Cathedral where they sang for the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, and a local chronicler reported that 'here the English sang as well as had been heard in the cathedral for thirty years'. Having arrived at Constance, they sang for the feast of St Thomas of Canterbury, drawing this report from [the chronicler Ulrich von] Richental: "And in the morning the [English] celebrated the feast beautifully with a great noise, with great burning candles, and with angelically sweet singing at Vespers, with organs and *prosunen*, above which were tenor, discant and medius."
> (*http://renaissancemusik.dk/festival/2012/texts/fallows-eng.html*)

This celebration of the music for the feast of Saint Thomas of Canterbruy apparently also left a lasting impression upon the continent. But those anonymous cathedral singers are not usually given credit for allegedly and momentarily establishing the hegemony of English music in Europe. My main point however is that Dunstable's composition is an extreme example of the way in which polyphonic music could manifestly displace attention from the text and in effect intentionally obfuscate its sense.

Veni

The second Dunstable composition performed at Canterbury in 1416 is also a triple-text polyphonic composition. It incorporates the *Veni sancte spiritus* attributed to the 12th-century Archbishop of Canterbury Simon Langton, and includes two others texts beginning with *Veni*: *Veni sancte spiritus et infunde primitus*, and *Veni creator spiritus*. The overall triple composition was most probably written originally for the feast of the Trinity, or possibly Pentecost. Each individual hymn text (and the original music) would have been familiar to a late mediaeval congregation. Here are just the first twelve lines of each text, arranged in parallel columns:

Veni Sancte Spiritus	Veni Sancte Spiritus	Veni Creator Spiritus
et emitte celitus	et infunde primitus	mentes tuorum visita
lucis tue radium.	rorem celi gracie	imple superna gracia
Veni pater pauperum	Precantes humanitus	que tu creasti pectora,
veni dator munerum	salva nos divinitus	Qui Paraclitus diceris
veni lumen cordium	a serpentis facie.	donum Dei altissimi
Consolator optime	in cuius presencia	fons vivus, ignis, caritas,
dulcis hospes anime	ex tua clemencia	et spiritalis unccio.
dulce refrigerium	tecta sint peccata.	Tu septiformis munere
in labore requies	nostraque servicia	dextre Dei, tu digitus

in estu temperies	corda penitencia	tu rite promisso Patris
in fletu solacium.	tibi fac placata.	sermone ditans guttura.

You might try listening to three people simultaneously reading aloud these three columns.

Here in an English translation is a very tentative indication of how you might find yourself trying to follow the sense of the words of these first few lines while listening to the three texts simultaneously, with / marking where one might find attention has switched between audible phrases:

Come, Holy Spirit/ and send out from heaven/ the ray of your light/
Come, Holy Spirit/ and pour in first/ the dew of the grace of heaven/
Come, Creator Spiri/ visit the minds of your people/
Come, father of the poor/ come, giver of gifts/ come, light of hearts./
Us praying humanly/ save divinely/ from the face of the serpent/
with supernal grace/ the breasts which you have created/
Best consoler/ sweet guest of the soul,/ sweet cool refreshment/
In whose presence/ by your clemency/ sins may be covered/
You who are called Paraelete/ gift of the most high God/
In labour rest/ in summer heat temperateness/ in weeping consolation/
our services/ our hearts, by penitence/ make disposed to you/
living fountain, fire, charity/ and spiritual unction./

This is not, of course, how Dunstable's score actually arranges and distributes the words in relation to the music, as a downloadable version of the score can demonstrate (available at *IMSLP44278-PMLP95184-Dunstaple_ Veni_Sancte*).

Dunstable has deliberately set a number of individually coherent texts to music in such a way that their content is rendered difficult to disentangle and one's attention is continually displaced or diverted. This may be a deliberate provoking of a response to the very fact of their being so composited together, but for listeners, if not also for performers, following the sense of the words becomes almost impossible. But then why was the work so composed? Is the comprehensibility of the actual words not important or even necessary?

One might suggest that, in this specific case, the deliberate simultaneity of the three texts is intended to prompt a complex reaction to this triple conjuncture as itself an indirect allusion to the three-fold Trinity. Registering that feature or aspect, I might even sketch a fairly plausible quasi-theological reflection upon Dunstable's overall composition, interpreting it as an almost apophatic exercise in going beyond the lexical-audible to suggest a spectrum of language outside the range of the human voice and ear. One might recall Dante.

Since Dunstable was known for his interests in astronomy and mathematics, and his music is profoundly permeated by mathematical

calculation, perhaps a modern listener could invoke the notions of humanly visible light as only part of the spectrum of illumination, and ordinary numbers as only the immediately intelligible segment of the fuller range of all calculation. A music beyond audible legibility is not inconceivable, and perhaps even akin to the music of the spheres or heavenly angels. The Dominican Herbert McCabe's notion of Aquinas's analogical procedure as 'trying to mean' might be feasibly applied to Dunstable's music as 'trying' to make a sense beyond words.

An appropriate 'meditation' might be further elaborated by exploring an affinity between the simultaneous triple text and the fundamental mystery of the Trinity itself, which thereby could become the direct object of a reflection or contemplation. The intricate interweaving of multiple musical and textual meanings and associations may also be regarded as having a certain congruence with a theological conception of God as the object of the deity's own unending and inexhaustible act of self-contemplation. Or the mind might find itself envisaging the almost infinite combination of all other texts available for simultaneous meditation and thereby in practice as beyond human comprehension, though God's own act of divine conception might be both instantaneous and intrinsically asymptotic, an unending endeavour celebrated in the infinity of angelic prayer. And so on. All this might well appeal to a meditative Parisian Scholastic – but only if he stopped actually listening to the performance in order to concentrate on the theology of the Trinity.

A more musicological reflection might chime instead with an imagined infinity of possible musical expression, a notion that all music, however familiar, can be heard as suggesting potential variations upon itself, and that this particular aural configuration implicitly evokes, while differentiating itself from, all other possible combinations of notes and sounds, pitch and rhythm, since every specific musical experience implicitly promises a potentially unending interplay of other musical expectations, satisfactions, and surprises, embracing an ultimate range of all possible compositions. A combined multi-textual-musical polyphony could in principle become a single self-generating infinite hyper-composition. Yet not even an eternity could complete such a composition or conclude a performance incorporating every combination of musical variations. Insofar as the three-in-one God is inconceivable, ineffable, beyond even concept, so too it seems that the most appropriate form of praise we can envisage is an eternal choir singing endless multi-voiced polyphony. (Incidentally, what if one doesn't actually like that kind of music when one gets to paradise? Is there a 'quiet room' available?)

If such quasi-theological musings are regarded as somewhat over-elaborate one might compare them with the comments by several musicologists on the contribution of mathematics to Dunstable's compositional procedures. I offer some extracts from a not untypical example, an article by Brian Trowell entitled 'Proportion in the Music of

Dunstable', published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 105 (1978-1979), pp. 100-141:

> Returning to Table I, we note that Dunstable normally started by planning a tenor or color of rhythmically structured plainchant which could be stated three times in the diminishing proportions 9:6:3 or 6:4:3. This was achieved by applying diminishing time-signatures. In the first case, 9:6:3, a ternary long, worth 3 ternary breves and therefore 9 semibreves, was made binary on its first repeat (though still with ternary breves and therefore 6 semibreves); it was then diminished still further, into a ternary breve, for the third statement. For the proportions 6:4:3 one started with a binary long, worth two ternary breves and therefore 6 semibreves; on the first repeat the long was still worth two breves, but they became binary, making four semibreves; on the second repeat the long was diminished into a ternary breve. If one chose the proportions 9:6:3, the result was an arithmetical progression (which could be extended upwards…). The proportions 6:4:3 are, however, a harmonic progression and as such would have been much more highly esteemed by . . medieval mathematicians: the proportion between the extreme terms 6 and 3 (here dupla, 2:1) is identical with the proportion governing the differences between the central terms and each extreme, i.e. 6-4 : 4-3, which is also 2:1.

And this, concerning Dunstable's *Speciosa facta es* :

> There is, unusually, no change of time-signature in this piece, which consists of 56 breves, i.e. 28 longs. 28 was a mathematically significant number in two ways: it is the seventh triangular number (1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7) and the second perfect number, i.e. the sum of its own factors, excluding itself: 1 + 2 + 4 + 7 + 14. The first section contains the sum of the first three factors (1 + 2 + 4), the second the sum of the last two (7 + 14).

There is an obvious continuity here with the study of *musica* as one of the disciplines within the *quadrivium*, the basic mediaeval curriculum for both monasteries and universities, since *musica* for Boethius and the scholastics was primarily a theoretical inquiry into mathematics and proportion, with links rather to astronomy or astrology than to practical performance. There are also sometimes unexpected echoes of the kind of 'monastic theology' or Alexandrian glosses based upon what one might regard as over-ingenious interpretations of biblical texts. As in Trowell's remark:

> . . the presence of two more sacred symbolic numbers . . must surely be seen as clinching what I have said about the use of the gematric 152. If we look at those sections in which 152 is not used, namely Ab, Cb, Eb

> and Gb, we find the figure 33 enthroned amid three 51s, which total 153. 33 was widely venerated because Christ died in his 33rd year. 153 is elaborately discussed by St Augustine as the number of the miraculous draught of fishes in John XXI, 11, which represented the number of sinners saved (see Ezekiel XLVII and Matthew XIII, 47f.); it is also the sum of the numbers 1-17 and thus the 17th triangular number. . .

This rigorous approach is undoubtedly pertinent and perhaps more plausible than my pseudo-theological exercises. There is indeed an overlap between them since mathematics and proportionality were regarded, in quasi-Platonic fashion, as defining the character of the music to be heard in heaven. Yet I doubt if anyone actually listening to a performance of Dunstable's *Veni* composition can attend to either such musicological or theological responses, however apposite, without ceasing to listen to or even hear the music. When asked about the underlying structure of a wonderfully poignant elegy the composer Peter Maxwell Davies acknowledged that it was based upon the magic square of the number nine but promptly said he had hoped that nobody would notice. Incidentally, Dunstable would have been well aware that Arezzo took the names of the musical notes, *ut-re-mi-fa-so-la-si* , from the first six half-lines of a hymn in the office for St. John the Baptist, the *Ut queant laxis* – perhaps another in-joke to share with his patron and the King?:

Crucially, a triply composite text which is no longer comprehensible as text has in effect become itself a purely musical component since the words are not decipherable as words but heard only as sounds. The visible distinction in a modern score between notes on staves and lines of text becomes potentially a fissure between sound and sense in which the sense is swallowed by the sound. In effect, the emotional or affective response of listening to the music displaces or replaces intellectual concern with the content of these three texts. Which is, I suspect, how most people are likely to listen to a performance of Dunstable's *Veni* composition, whether in 1416 or today. And whether in a church or a concert hall.

So, to revert to an earlier motif, it could be suggested that once the increasingly unavoidable philosophical aporias and theological paradoxes were analytically probed in the Schools, the more insoluble they could come to seem. Thereby encouraging a revival of aspects of the apophatic tradition (from, say, Meister Eckhart to John of the Cross). Which may also have invited both a creative and an evasive response, the development of a form of relocated or displaced intellectual effort in the composition of ever more intricately complex music, allowing or prompting us simply to lose ourselves in the paradoxes of doctrinal belief but without any dangerously presumptuous attempt actually to formulate, understand, or resolve them.

Abelard's *Sic et Non* again comes to mind. And Saint Bernard's horror at Abelard's whole *oeuvre*. Perhaps some monks recognised that just as they

were vicariously praying on behalf of those who could not do so themselves, they too as monks were content to rely upon the efforts of the intellectuals in universities to undertake any necessary thinking on their behalf. Meanwhile, they could simply carry on chanting. Or even just counting.

Bearing in mind Dunstable's own intellectual interests, one might even suggest a modern parallel. After the intense philosophical and epistemological debates in the 1930s concerning the significance of quantum mechanics, the dominant post-war reaction in day-to-day teaching of that paradoxical domain of physics was the well-known pedagogical instruction: "Shut up and just calculate." Clearly, the point of elaborating a polyphonic and polysemic text was not to dwell upon, still less to resolve, Scholastic dilemmas, but rather to celebrate traditional doctrinal quasi-propositions in a mode of affective devotion and emotional absorption. Recall again Saint Bernard: 'when Scripture portrays God for us it suggests him in terms of our own feelings.' Exploring the complex sonorities of measured music and polyphony was probably a more reassuring and comforting exercise than following the intricate and perhaps ultimately destructive logic of a Duns Scotus. Others might, of course, take a different view.

heavenly

A music beyond audibility is not inconceivable. Moments in Beethoven's late quartets or Messaien's *Quartet for the end of time* may seem to reach beyond the audible range, as, in a different register, a continuous intoning of "OM" or the incessant whirling of a Dervish might aim to conduce in the chanting or dancing self a state 'beyond' consciousness. At its most intense perhaps, such possibilities may be imagined as being heard in the overtones or resonance of a single sustained or repeated note, as in some forms of eastern music.

In some mediaeval music a persistent drone can act as a baseline allowing us to 'hear' the possibilities, actually audible or not, in all other notes, so that the particular polyphonic lines built upon the drone seemingly permit a more explicit awareness of ever-unfolding further variations and overtones, as some modern serial music also apparently presents itself. Ideally, one might claim that to listen adequately to a particular piece of music is always to hear its implicit relationship to all other potential pieces of music, and one can sometimes get the unnerving impression that this is indeed how someone like Adorno was actually able to listen. The musical quizzes during the broadcast intervals of opera performances from the New York Met sometimes give the same impression, as contributors – or contestants? – are asked to identify a composition from a single opening note. Presumably a guest from the *chorus angelorum* would have little difficulty in (silently) competing.

One could further speculate that the point of an eternal heavenly composition or infinite angelic performance would not be to reach some inconceivable ending, a resolvable finale, but to respond endlesly and asymptotically to a fully present-continuous sound, trying to register a music constantly seeming to reach beyond itself, as in the familiar but cliché device of an apparently ever-ascending crescendo beyond even an ethereal soprano limit. What happens to any text set to such music is, literally, another matter.

We know from some of his own drawings that Dunstable was indeed fascinated by number and calculation. There is also a clear affinity between the preoccupations of late mediaeval music theorists and some of the more experimental composers of the modern period. One might instance the resonances of Okhegem in the work of Webern, or even the interests of computerised composition programmers in the example of Guido Arezzo (see GUIDO Music Notation). That however is yet another story. Let us instead look at another composer connected with Canterbury, and consider a different use of polyphony, a probably more familiar instance of how liturgical music could become dissociated from the sense of its text.

Power

I have used Dunstable's complex compositions to illustrate one tendency in the development of polyphonic music, that of allowing the sung text to become incomprehensible while the musical virtuosity of the performance is fore-grounded. This can be related to the professionalisation of music careers, especially in the chapel choirs of aristocratic households. It also possibly related to a more widespread tendency, to prioritise emotional response to music over the textual content of the liturgy.

I now want to instance some compositions by Lionel Power to highlight a related tendency and context. Like Dunstable, Power was employed in an aristocratic household, that of Thomas Duke of Clarence. In his article 'Some Observations on the Life and Career of Lionel Power' (*Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 102, 1975-76) Roger Bowers described Duke Thomas's household chapel as consisting of a dean, twenty-four gentlemen chaplains, sixteen clerks, and four choristers, and identified 'Lionell Power' as a member of the chapel who served not only as clerk but also as 'instructor of the choristers'. Henry V's own Chapel Royal consisted of a Dean, 18 priests, 14 clerks, and 16 choristers and at least five composers provided polyphonic liturgical music for it. Bowers suggests that the encouragement of polyphonic music in 15th-century English household choirs was partly a deliberate response to Lollard criticisms of elaborate liturgical music, an element in the critique directed at lavish church ornamentation and ecclesiastical ceremonial.

Though it was originally compiled for some other institution, possibly Clarence's, the most significant surviving collection of early 15th century

English music, known as the Old Hall manuscript, was probably enlarged by Chapel Royal composers. More than twenty compositions attributable to Power are included in the manuscript, which dates from about 1410-20. Power may also have composed a work related to Canterbury in 1420. Denis Stevens has written of one item in his booklet, previously mentioned:

> The melody of *opem nobis* [from the litugy for Thomas Becket] occurs . . as the tenor of a *Credo* by a gentleman composer . . Leonel Power . . he might have contributed to the polyphonic Mass mentioned in the documents for the jubilee year of 1420. . . and an anonymous *Gloria,* which also draws upon the Office of St Thomas for its tenor: the antiphon at Lauds, *Ad Thomae memoriam.*

The close agreement in stylistic features, and the fact that both works were carefully copied into the Old Hall manuscript, join with the presence of the Thomas antiphons to suggest that Power thought of these two compositions as a deliberately related pairing intended for a special feast-day or ceremony.

Clarence died in 1421, the year after the Jubilee, and Power probably attended the burial service at Canterbury when the Duke was interred in Saint Michael's Chapel. Shortly after, according to Frank Ll. Harrison, in *Music In Mediaeval Britain* (1958, p. 42f):

> The records of Christ Church, Canterbury, show that Leonel Power**,** undoubtedly the composer, was received into the fraternity of the monastery in 1423 and died on June 5, 1445. He was not employed by the Priory during all of this period, however, for his name appears only in the livery lists (which were made out yearly at Easter) covering the years 1441-5. lt is among the *armiger*i or *esquires*, called *generosi* in most of the later lists, who were laymen of relatively high status, such as the master mason, who worked for the Priory and received an annual allowance of livery.

After the death of Clarence, Power was presumably employed in other households, even perhaps for a while alongside Dunstable in the household of the Duke of Bedford. Then, according to Bowers:

> On 20 September 1438, styling himself Lionel Power of Canterbury, gentleman (armiger), he executed at Canterbury a legal document known technically as a quitclaim, in favour of a certain Thomas Ragoun. . . by which time he was probably about sixty years old . . and one year later his name begins to appear in the archives of the cathedral in contexts which seem to indicate that he had entered full-time, if light, employment there in some capacity. Nowhere, unfortunately, are his position and duties clearly defined; but they can be inferred. It appears

> that he had moved to Canterbury in semi-retirement in order to inaugurate a Lady Chapel choir in the cathedral church and to serve as its first Master.

John Stone in his *Chronicle* includes a Leonel Power as a member of the Christ Church community and records Power's death in 'the guest-house facing the court' and his burial 'next to the gate of the cemetery' on June 6th 1445. Stone makes no reference to Power's musical status, though he elsewhere pays tribute to the musical ability of two precentors of the monastery.

Lady Chapel

The Lady Chapel to which Power was appointed in 1438 should be distinguished from the present Our Lady 'Undercroft' chapel in the crypt which was always a private place of devotion for the monastic community. Margaret Sparks, in her pamphlet *The Two Lady Altars in Canterbury Cathedral*, 1989, says of the crypt Lady Chapel:

> votive masses were said at the Lady Altar, and it was sometimes used by young monks saying their first mass. The Warden [of the chapel] said Mass daily. Three times a year there was a sung mass – on the feast of the Purification, the Assumption, and the Nativity of Our Lady. [John Stone's] chronicle relates that on special occasions the boys from the Almonry chapel outside the priory gate would sing a mass at the undercroft altar, as on the visits of Queen Margaret in 1446 and 1454.

The crypt Lady Chapel had replaced the original monastic Lady Chapel in the nave which had become a semi-public place of worship when the church was extended eastwards by Anselm and the rood screen was relocated to its present position under the crossing tower. Sparks:

> The chapel [was] at the East end of the North aisle of the nave of Lanfranc's church where from perhaps the late 12th century there was a daily celebration of Lady Mass, and in the late 13th century eight monks were to sing the mass. In 1305 the eight were to be joined by four altar clerks, from the two Lady Chapels and the two Thomas Becket altars, one at the shrine and one in the martyrdom. The monk Precentor was to be present daily to preside over the choir of twelve. . . When the nave of the Cathedral priory was rebuilt, and finished in 1405, the Lady Chapel was reinstated . . From 1438 there was a new choir, a choir of boys from the Almonry School who sang a plainsong Lady Mass with their Master, called the Cantor; they also sang an antiphon after Vespers. This was a fashion at the time in monasteries, the cathedrals and collegiate churches: Canterbury was not among the first to set up

> such a choir; but when they did so, they chose a distinguished retired court musician, Lionel Power, to run the choir. He died in 1445 at the guesthouse, Prior Chillenden's Chambers, where he presumably lodged, and was succeeded after an interval of some months in 1446 by Thomas Ware, who was styled Master of the Singing Boys and Clerk of the Lady Chapel.

Bowers suggests that Power's later compositions may also have been sung by the main monastic community, and Sparks cites him as confirming, upon the basis of a Christ Church inventory from around 1530, that: 'Volumes of polyphonic music in four, five and six parts, suggest that within the constraints implicit upon the Lady Chapel choir, there was nothing being composed in the early sixteenth century that this choir would not have been able to sing.' Bowers also remarks that:

> The choir inaugurated by Power was revived late in 1446. It appears to have continued to flourish without a break until the dissolution of the Priory on 4 April 1540 – an event which the boys and master of the Lady Chapel choir survived unscathed, simply by becoming the nucleus of the full-time secular choir with which the New Foundation Cathedral was immediately equipped. Thus the choir which Power helped to inaugurate some 550 years ago survives to this day as the modern Canterbury Cathedral choir.

In 1448 a new Lady Chapel was constructed to replace the Norman chapels of Saint Benedict and Saint Blaise in the North West transept, next to the site of the Martyrdom. The architecture, the internal arrangement, and the statuary and stained glass windows (mostly now lost), all indicate that the new chapel was specifically designed for a choir, though by the 18th century it had been repurposed as a burial place for the Deans of the Cathedral.

Lady music

By the 15th century the choirs for the newly flourishing Lady Chapels in England were mainly boys choirs and the congregations which attended were mostly women who would not themselves have taken part in the singing. Though one can imagine mothers in the chapel congregation taking a particular pleasure and pride in the performance of their own sons from the local school. Those individuals appointed to supervise the boys choirs and the musical repertoire of the Lady Chapels were increasingly not monks or clerics but lay professionals. The services for such Lady Chapels were much shorter than the daily Office of the main monastic or cathedral liturgy and were not sung collectively by a participating monastic community but designed primarily for listening by a mainly female congregation.

The professionals attached to a Lady Chapel were not necessarily required to compose music but we know that several Masters of the Canterbury Lady Chapel subsequent to Power produced compositions which have not survived. Similarly, the members of the choir might increasingly assume the function of professional performers. Harrison noted (p. 43) that the Canterbury boys were not provided for in the livery lists until 1454, after which they appear regularly as *octo pueri cantoris*. In the emergence of boys choirs attached to the cathedral Lady Chapels we can register a development which would eventually result in the castrati attached to Papal and Episcopal chapels. The boy singers, unlike the monastic oblates who had been largely discontinued by the 15th century, would not have undergone the long process of memorising the music for the monastic liturgical cycle, and would have needed to learn a repertoire used specifically in the Lady Chapel. Presumably Power could have readily re-used his own Marian antiphons composed earlier in his career.

Power also wrote a treatise primarily aimed at instructing young choristers, which may date either from his employment by Clarence or his duties at Canterbury. It survives in a manuscript collection (BL Lansdowne 763) and is headed: 'Tretis upon ye Gamme for hem that wil be syngers, or makers, or techers'. It comprises detailed instructions for the singing of extempore 'discant'. The same manuscript includes a 'A litil tretise acording to ye ferst tretise of ye sight of Descant' which may also be by Power, and a third treatise on musical mensuration. The treatise upon the gamme (gamut, or scale) is specifically for a teacher who would 'enforme a child in his counterpoynt' and teach the ability to improvise at the two highest 'sightes', 'quatreble' and 'treble'. The now familiar term 'sight reading' indicated for Power that the choristers should literally visualise or imagine their intended transpositions of the plainsong and mentally reposition the notes above or below the written notes in front of them, with the treble an octave above and the quatreble a 12th or an octave and a fifth above or below the staff. Jeffrey Pulver in one of the earliest articles on Power's treatise (*The Musical Times*, Aug., 1934) explains the improvisation required:

> Fundamentally it consisted of a continuous accompaniment of the Cantus Firmus by the third and sixth above, with the exceptions that at the opening and close of each phrase the third was replaced by a fifth, and the sixth by an octave. This singing of the two upper parts . . was extemporised by the discanters simply reading from the plainsong and imagining the transposed intervals. . . Power ends [his treatise]: 'But who wil kenne [know] his gamme well, and the ymaginacions therof, and of hys accordis, and sette hys perfyte accordis wyth hys imperfyte accordis, as I have rehersed in thys tretise afore, he may not faile of hys counterpoynte in short tyme.'

It is worth noting that the other most important compendium of English music from this period, known as the Eton Choir Book, was also written partly for boys voices, though presumably with a considerable range of resources available.

Writing generally about the compositions in the Old Hall Manuscript, Margaret Bent (in *Early Music*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Jan., 1974) suggests that:

> . . two stylistic types can be distinguished; firstly, the sonorous chordal style known, because of its origins in the discant sections of 13th-century organum, as English discant and, secondly, the range of techniques and textures which may be broadly classed under motet style. The relevant feature of English discant is a plainsong tenor moving at the same speed or nearly as fast as the other parts and with a fair degree of contrary motion. Beyond this, the late 14th-century style carries the plainsong in the middle of three parts, whose ranges are distinct (usually A T B), and the movement is basically in breve values . . lightly ornamented.

There has been considerable research and debate concerning how one might categorise the English music of this period: whether various compositions are to be regarded as 'old-fashioned' 'discant' (itself a problematic term), as perhaps influenced by English carols or French 'chanson', or as instances of what became known as 'consonance angloise' (another problematic term), and even whether such terms as 'motet' or 'polyphony' itself are applicable to the multi-voice compositions of the time.

However, for my purposes, listening to a range of composers from both the Eton Choir Book and the Old Hall Manuscript suggests a somewhat simpler categorisation, an immediately audible distinction between those compositions which tend towards making it difficult to disentangle which words are being voiced at any one moment, and those which deploy the multiple voices to reinforce the sense of the text, sometimes with a leading voice being repeated, buttressed, or supported by the repetition of a single text with the other voices variously overlapping but without competitive jostling for the listeners' attention.

However, when the words sung are primarily for a listening lay audience as part of an overall devotional service, those words can become secondary to the experience of the music in different ways. The texts to be sung may, for example, be adjusted to a more accessible version of Latin and if even that simpler Latin is not understood the restriction matters less if the overall significance of the act of listening to the music has become most important.

*

Some of Power's surviving compositions are similar to Dunstable's work in their use of complex polyphonic texture. In particular, the four pieces which are regarded as comprising the *Missa alma redemptoris* make considerable use of a-synchronous phrasing, the interweaving of several registers of pitch, including considerable melismatic inventiveness, and probably required rather more chorister resources than those of the Canterbury Lady Chapel.

The *Agnus Dei* in particular seems to exploit the required triple repetition of the liturgical text to explore a variety of ways in which the same words can be differently set to music, as itself a demonstration of the composer's professional skill. Both the *Gloria* and the *Credo* foreground a solo voice clearly and faithfully articulating the text in both cases while the supporting secondary voices richly embellish the words. The resonances between these four liturgical compositions may have constituted the deliberate construction of a unified development of the four mass texts by utilising a shared underlying musical structure, a forerunner of the future familiar composition of a 'Mass' as almost a single concert piece in four 'movements'.

By contrast, a number of the compositions in both manuscript collections which celebrate the Virgin Mary, such as *Salve Regina* or the *Ave regina caelorum*, tend to deploy a much less ambitious musical texture. Each relatively simple text is arranged across two or three voices which are characterised not by extensive counterposing of different textual strands heard a-synchronously but by a consolidation and reinforcement of the same phrase repeated in a supporting harmony, a fluid blending of confirmatory voices in closely aligned registers. The pace is often no more than a gentle steadiness with noticeable rests and pausings, with each phrase allowed its own aural space.

One way in which both improvised and scored polyphony were implemented was to create an essentially affective composition with the harmonisation of voices either reinforcing or only momentarily effacing the text being sung. Arguably, in Power's Marian compositions, including music probably later performed for the Canterbury Lady Chapel congregation, there is a noticeable avoidance of complex text content or compact formulations and instead a setting of simple affirmative statements of doctrinal positions. The Marian antiphons and hymns tend to offer a list of attributes of a recognisably human and attractive kind, encouraging a manifestly emotional appreciation, an affirmation of devout love for the Virgin Mary.

Clearly, that mode may have been precisely designed for the women who especially attended the Lady Chapel services. A 'sacred' text set to music could combine a powerful and moving emotional expression with a familiar assertion of statements or quasi-propositions which would be difficult to

justify if confronted directly with a query as to their 'meaning'. The notion of a virgin mother of God incorporates at least three undoubtedly very peculiar paradoxes which might be celebrated but not easily understood or explained. Musical attractiveness could in effect allow listening believers to evade or decline to acknowledge the problematic character of some traditional Marian texts, and such complexities might be avoided or omitted in the first place by the words carefully chosen to be set to music.

Overall, if we compare the function of music in these two manuscript collections with the role of music in the traditional monastic liturgy there is a palpable paradigm shift: from a situation in which the music is sung because of the text, to one in which the text is sung because of the music. In the monastic liturgy the basic plainchant primarily assisted the orderly collective recitation of texts selected according to the requirements of the day's liturgical office. Chanting also enabled a clarity of articulation and comprehensibility, contributed to memorability, and allowed relatively occasional enhancement and elaboration of the text as a contribution to the overall context of liturgical ceremony. The actual content of the text was primarily reflected upon outside the liturgy itself by consulting in the cloister the numerous commentaries upon the Bible and the Fathers.

In the early 15th-century music preserved in the Eton and Old Hall manuscripts and mainly performed in household chapels and Lady Chapels the function of the chosen texts is primarily to provide words, and indeed syllables, upon which a composition can be constructed and listened to with the primary aim of providing an experience of the music rather than clarifying the sense of the words. The texts when written in Latin were not so much understood, with their sense elucidated by studying commentaries and glosses, but rather recognised as formulations made reassuringly familiar by the repeated performance of the musical pieces themselves. The blending of words and music foregrounded precisely those emotional and affective aspects which Saint Bernard, for example, inveighed against as distractions for monks from the sense of the sacred texts.

We have largely inherited and now take for granted this emotional-affective experience as the main rationale and fundamental function for all music, including text-less music as a later development in the subordination of text, and eventually the jettisoning of text entirely while retaining instrumental 'voices' articulated in some form of 'conversation' with a claim that the music itself thereby provides a 'meaning'. The earlier comment about the music being conceived of as the 'work' is again apposite especially if one (mis-)perceives late mediaeval polyphony as trying to become Beethoven's late string quartets.

One anonymous Old Hall piece, *Post missarum solennie*, even strives to find words to characterise its own music:

Post missarum solennie divina post eulogia voce cum duciflua decantemus cantica . .

Da nos ita psaltere et laudis musas prodere per odas iperliricas ut demus Deo gratias.

After the solemnity of mass, after the divine eulogy, we will sing songs with sweetly fluent voice…[*dulciflua*]
Give us such qualities that we may sing and bring forth the muses of praise through highly lyrical [*iperliricas*] odes as we give forth 'Deo gratias'.

Some centuries later, a music CD entitled *The Canterbury Tradition*, which used to be on sale in the cathedral gift shop, also made an effort to characterise the music by various composers (all of them post-mediaeval):

. . the gentle effortless flow of some of Faure's later songs is foreshadowed with ravishing effect. . .This little chant is a highly evocative and simple vehicle for this magical Psalm 121. . .The exciting and vibrant idiom of his writing with its fresh but very approachable feel . . These masterful arrangements of the well-known melodies bring a wonderful variety of colours and moods by quite simple means but with the greatest effect. . . A very moving anthem with echoes of a lament. . .

Clearly, what is being offered to the listener is mainly an affective experience, as somehow a devotional engagement. A comment concerning the inclusion of some psalms is also worth citing:

The Anglican chant, as it is known, has a particular beauty in the way in which the rhythm of the text is allowed to flow and the words to speak for themselves. . There is is a distinct variety of mood in each of these [Psalms 59, 60 and 61] which is enhanced by the chant chosen for it.

illuminated music

In Power's *Ave Regina coelorum* (Old Hall 43) there is a sense that the keywords are chosen (and here italicised) not only to honour the Virgin but to provide words which might also apply, hopefully, both to the women listening and to the music they are hearing:

Ave Regina coelorum.	Hail Queen of heaven
Ave domina angelorum.	Hail mistress of angels.
Salve radix *sancta*	Welcome, root of sanctity
ex qua mundo lux est orta.	from which world light comes forth.
Ave *gloriosa*	Hail glorious one,
super omnes *speciosa.*	beautiful above all things.

Valle valde *decora*	Greetings, ever adorn
et pro nobis semper	and pray for us always
Christum exora.	before Christ.

The words are sung with a slow articulation, emphasising the repeated *A* vowel, and are distinctly legible despite the voices mildly overlapping with each other. The pattern of rhyming and chiming is emphasised, while the somewhat elusive notion of Mary as 'domina angelorum' is elided into simply another term in a litany of praise. The piece takes over two minutes to sing fewer than thirty words. Compared with basic plainchant, a number of the short Marian compositions are considerably lengthened, with each syllable clearly extended, rather like someone carefully speaking a foreign language, but the primary invitation is still to linger over the musical notes. Examples would be the various versions of *Nesciens mater*, while Power's *Beata progenies* lasts nearly three times as long as a simple plainchant rendition of the text:

Beata progenies unde Christus natus est
quam gloriosa est virgo qui coeli regem genuit.

Blessed is the lineage whence Christ is born
how glorious is the Virgin who gave birth to the king of the heavens.

His *Beata viscera* begins in plainchant and then a mere seven words take nearly two minutes:

Beata viscera / Maria Virginis que portaverunt eterni Patris filium .
Blessed is the womb / of the Virgin Mary which bore the son of the eternal father.

A more complex example would be his *Salve, Regina misericordiae*, which lasts about four minutes but with three troped insertions extending it to over seven minutes. The final trope dwells upon the emotions prompted by the agonies of the crucifixion:

Funde preces tuo nato,	Pour out our prayers to thy Son,
crucifixo, vulnerato,	who was crucified, wounded
et pro nobis flagellato,	and scourged for us,
spinis puncto, felle potato.	pierced with thorns, given gall to drink

It is not that we need the vowel-lengthening in order to understand the (Latin) words or that the words require a great deal of thoughtful response, but rather that we are invited to respond to the musical presentation of intermittently recognisable words which carry an affective charge for us and

are often highlighted by the melodic conjuncture of the different voices converging upon those particular emotionally charged words.

A parallel might be drawn with that other reduced version of the monastic liturgy which became popular during the same period, again especially among women, the 'Book of Hours', those small but sometimes luxuriant prayer-books which included an almost miniaturised version of the liturgical offices ('hours').

What is striking is the often densely decorated character of the manuscript pages, where the eye falls first upon a miniature illustration or a pleasingly elaborated and intricate margin rather than upon the words which are to be recited. The 'illuminated' element in a book of hours has a function not unlike the music in a Lady Chapel polyphonic performance, both to draw attention to the designated words but also almost to distract from their content by providing a visible rather than oral ornamentation which pleases the senses while also instilling a mood of devotional reflection, a recognition and implementation of the prayerful attitude required and induced by attending to what, in its different register, is undoubtedly a 'work' of 'art'.

Some early Canterbury manuscripts of Anselm's 'prayers and meditations' already have the look of pages from a book of hours and one suspects that the versions copied to send to his noble lady correspondents were perhaps suitably illustrated and perhaps splendidly decorated in the Canterbury scriptorium. There are considerable affinities between the 'prayerful' emotional element in Anselm's writings, the account of 'monastic theology' we considered earlier, and the musical repertoire composed for the Lady Chapels.

Tallis

The third figure I want to consider is Thomas Tallis, whose direct personal connection to Canterbury was brief but whose work further illustrates the issues which interest me. Born in 1508/10 and dying in 1585, Tallis's life and career straddled the long Reformation process in England, which saw four monarchs of varying religious alignments, from Henry VIII through Edward VI and Mary to Elizabeth. Tallis's first known musical employment was as an organist from about 1531 at Dover Priory, a daughter foundation of Canterbury Christ Church which was dissolved in 1535. He was then an organist at a London parish church until 1537 and at Waltham Abbey, the last monastic institution to be expropriated in 1540, in the same year as Canterbury Christ Church. Tallis was briefly appointed to the Canterbury Cathedral New Foundation choir and then in 1542 joined the Chapel Royal where he remained for the rest of his career.

I want first to focus on two pieces, *Ave dei patris* and *Ave rosa sine spinis*. A leading Tallis scholar, Nigel Sandon, once asserted of these pieces: 'Where *Ave rosa* and *Ave dei patris* resemble each other is in the texts, which are

vapid effusions to Our Lady of a kind common in early Tudor England.' He elsewhere comments, in the *Thomas Tallis The Complete Works* CD collection:.

> Dating these works—even placing them in chronological order—poses some interesting problems, because the evidence of the musical sources is sometimes at variance with that of the music. . . *Ave dei patris filia* betrays distinct signs of inexperience; *Ave rosa sine spinis* resembles *Ave dei patris filia* quite closely but evinces a somewhat stronger sense of control; *Salve intemerata* is markedly better planned and more skilfully written than the other two antiphons, and must obviously pre-date the Mass derived from it. The source evidence, however, appears to throw doubt upon these conclusions. *Ave rosa sine spinis* and *Salve intemerata* and its associated Mass were all included in a set of partbooks (Cambridge University Library, Peterhouse MSS 471–4) compiled for Canterbury Cathedral at about the time when Tallis joined the cathedral choir in 1540; Tallis himself may well have made these works available to the copyist. Yet *Ave dei patris filia* was not copied into this set of partbooks, and in fact survives only in late Elizabethan and Jacobean sources post-dating the composer's death. If this really is the earliest of Tallis's votive antiphons, why is it preserved only in very late sources? In this context the absence of *Ave dei patris filia* from the partbooks copied for Canterbury could be significant. Perhaps Tallis did not offer *Ave dei patris filia* for copying – perhaps he even tried to suppress it – because he regarded it as a student composition unrepresentative of his maturity.

Sandon's comments reflect the usual preoccupations of music historians with trying to trace through stylistic evidence the musical career of individual composers, in a way that is largely impossible and arguably irrelevant for the corpus of early anonymous mediaeval liturgical chant. However, if one asks questions not only about the composer's artistic development but the intended performers and 'audience', those dismissive comments about 'vapid effusions' may almost incidentally but usefully point to a probable context for such early pieces.

As with Canterbury, Dover Priory had a Lady Chapel and *Ave Dei Patris Filia* is a composition which suggests its appropriateness for a female congregation which could partially understand the markedly simple Latin text since almost every word is very nearly a familiar English word, except perhaps *ancilla* which means handmaid, and occurs memorably in the *Magnificat*.

The text simply comprises multiple superlative Latin epithets commonly associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary. The construction, if not the exact syntax, is also easily apparent, with the quadruple rhymings and in most stanzas the triple repetition of a keyword, *dei, summe, eterne, domini,* shaping

what becomes effectively a litany of admirable attributes. I can simply leave the first five stanzas in Latin:

Ave Dei patris filia nobilissima
Dei filii mater dignissima
Dei spiritus sponsa venustissima
Dei unius et trini ancilla subiectissima.

Ave summe eternitatis filia clementissima
Summe veritatis mater piissima
Summe bonitatis sponsa benignissima
Summe trinitatis ancilla mitissima.

Ave eterne caritatis desideratissima filia
Eterne sapientie mater gratissima
Eterne spiracionis sponsa sacratissima
Coeterne majestatis ancilla sincerissima.

Ave Jesu tui filii dulcis filia
Christi Dei tui mater alma
Sponsi sponsa sine ulla macula
Deitatis ancilla sessioni proxima.

Ave Domini filia singulariter generosa
Domini mater singulariter gloriosa
Domini sponsa singulariter speciosa
Domini ancilla singulariter obsequiosa.

And so on. Singing or listening to this piece takes almost twenty minutes, since the enunciation of the words is remarkably slow and clear, while even when phrases overlap in a poly-voiced texture, the effect is of repeating and highlighting rather than obscuring the basically very simple vocabulary. A rousing initial *Ave* clearly demarcates each stanza and the end-line rhymes allow an extended but relaxed elaboration on the final A vowels.

We can hear the second piece *Ave rosa sine spinis* with the same possible context of a Lady Chapel in mind. I give the text in English though I again think that most likely listeners, or my own readers, would not have much difficulty with the vocabulary and syntax of the Latin. In particular, the opening phrases of the first six stanzas would have been easily recognised as together constituting the familiar prayer, the 'Hail Mary': *Ave / Maria / Gratia plena/ Dominus tecum / Benedicta tu in mulieribus /Et bendictus fructus ventri tui.* The piece uses a very familiar set of words as a frame for the troped insertion of additional explanatory or expository glosses.

Hail, rose without thorns,
whom the Father set on high
in divine majesty
and made free from all sorrow.

Mary, called the star of the sea,
by your son you are made resplendent
with the bright light of divinity,
through which you shine with every virtue.

Full of grace the Holy Spirit filled you
while it made you the vessel of divine goodness
and total obedience.

The Lord is with you in a wondrous way,
the word of life made flesh
by the deed of the triune creator:
Oh, how sweet a vessel of love.

Blessed are you among women:
this is declared to all nations.
The Heavens acknowledge you to be blessed
and raised high above all.

And blessed is the fruit of your womb,
a gift for us always to enjoy here
as an inner foretaste,
and after death in perpetuity.

O merciful virgin Mary,
receive into the holy refuge of your heart
this perception of salvation, the grateful object
of your prayers. Amen.

Let me return to Nigel Sandon's comments. He contrasts these two pieces with another Tallis composition *Salve intemerata*:

> The text of the *Salve intemerata* however is different: a lengthy complex and carefully argued prose prayer to the virgin. Such texts seem to have increased in popularity . . during the 1530s and 40s . . The tenacity of Tallis's engagement with the *Salve intemerata* text is extremely impressive: the music is no less closely argued than the prayer itself, and the shape of the setting is clearly designed to reinforce the rhetorical structure of the text. . . This powerful and persuasive work marks a significant stage in the composer's development.

The Latin text to which Sandon refers is not, in my view, particularly complex, and can easily be translated into a suitably stilted ecclesiastical English:

> Hail, pure virgin Mary, Mother of the Son of God, chosen above all other virgins; who from the womb of thy mother Anna, most holy of women, was by the Holy Spirit first made holy, then filled with light, and was so greatly fortified by the grace of almighty God, that until the conception of thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and while thou were conceiving Him, and until the birth and while thou were bearing Him, and always after the birth, remained in body and spirit for your whole life the Virgin most pure, most incorruptible, most chaste of all who were born.
>
> Thou truly has surpassed, by the blamelessness of thy pure mind, all other virgins as many soever as have been either hitherto, from the beginning of the world, or ever shall be,
>
> We beseech thee, by this most excellent gift of heavenly grace imparted particularly from God to thee, Virgin and Mother Mary, above all other women and virgins, thou who art the merciful protector of unhappy mortals, to deem it right to intercede with Almighty God and His son Jesus Christ for our sins to be pardoned, according to the divinity of One who was begotten of the Father before all worlds, in accordance with His humanity because he was born of thee; so we pray to thee, who livest with the Holy Spirit, Holy Virgin, that when the stains of our sins have been taken away by thy intercession, we may be considered worthy to rejoice for ever with thee, praising thee in the Kingdom of Heaven for ever. Amen.

Given the mediaeval practice of writing liturgical texts, especially prose collects or graduals, as compact formulations of the doctrinal aspects of the feast being celebrated, this particular text would not seem an especially 'cogent and pointed discourse', or 'closely argued' at all, but rather a summarising statement of the well-trodden and the familiar, almost to the point of cliché, and largely a sequence of appropriate reminders when celebrating the blessed virgin Mary. The text may offer 'an orderly train of thought' but that the overall construction of that text is somewhat more rhetorical in its shaping than the merely paratactic texts so far discussed, is not in itself an indication of intellectual argument or even comprehension, whatever one's view of the music as 'powerful and persuasive' (what is it persuading us of?)

On the contrary, the piling up of softly mellifluous phrases effectively muffles or distracts any attention from the paradoxical core statements which are being affirmed. Rather than indicating greater intellectual rigour the *Salve intemerata* text merely rephrases the safely familiar formulae for the actually quite extraordinary claims being made concerning the virgin mother

of God. Which is perhaps one reason why Tallis's *Mass* based upon *Salve intemerata* remains one of the most frequently recorded and popular of his works. Not surprisingly, the text was taken from a 1527 printed 'book of hours', the domestic version of the divine office, but much reduced, simplified, and indeed prettified with decorative illuminations and predominantly designed for use by women reading alone.

*

Canterbury cathedral library still has a number of such early printed books of hours. It also has an example of another reduced version of the monastic divine office, a battered breviary for a travelling cleric, which though printed enfolds within itself, rather poignantly, a well-thumbed manuscript guide to forecasting the weather! The breviary is pocket-sized and much used, but, like a book of hours, a secular priest's breviary was only a pale echo of the full sung liturgy. For a solo priest to mutter his way through the assigned psalms and readings of the day, perhaps as rapidly as possible, was a wholly different experience from taking part in the communal chanting of the monastic office. As with celibacy, the daily clergy office was a misguided and inappropriate transfer from the monastic context to that of the parish priest. The celebration of Mass in an average mediaeval local church, with the priest murmuring in familiar but Latin sounds and with his back turned to the congregation, while the laity perhaps accompanied the priest's Latin with their own *sotto voce* supplementary prayers, sometimes read from miniature 'prayer books', had rightly been castigated by the Lollards as a hollow travesty of meaningful devotional worship.

What we can hear in these early compositions by Tallis is the deliberate use of pleasantly sung music to provide a primarily affective experience, to express an emotional response, to give voice to feelings devoutly directed at the virgin Mary. One might add that another possible context can be suggested. Fifteenth-century Kent had several small nunneries or convents, which also required a suitable music repertoire. In *Ave Dei Patris Filia* those extended *-aaaa* vowels and each exultant initial *Ave* perhaps offered an invitation for even the most timid nun in a convent to join in the singing. These are not particularly demanding pieces but musically enjoyable offerings, a fairly relaxed exercise of the vocal chords almost for its own sake.

Such pieces are fitted for particular 'situations', whatever evidence they may also provide concerning early or mature musical competence in the composer. They exemplify a more general mode of musical statements of doctrinal affirmations, in expressions effectively emptied of any troubling attention to intellectual content. The only trace of a potentially problematic formulation in *Ave rosa sine spinis* is the evasively laconic phrase 'in a wondrous way' as a disarming comment on the surely somewhat opaque phrase 'the word of life made flesh / by the deed of the triune creator'.

Early as they are, these Tallis compositions indicate a previous musical training. One interesting suggestion is that he may have been a boy

chorister in Canterbury, not as an oblate trainee in the Christ Church monastery but rather as a juvenile singer in the impressively large household chapel choir of Archbishop William Warham, whose death in 1532 may have prompted Tallis's move to Dover Priory, which Warham had claimed for his own patronage. Warham, the last Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury apart from Reginald Pole, is perhaps best remembered, if at all, for the gargantuan menu which has survived from the lavish feast of his inauguration in 1503, but he was also a generous patron and friend of both Erasmus and Thomas More and in some respects an example of a humanistically inclined version of Catholicism. Moreover, Tallis's last will in 1585 shows that he was still in touch with the local Catholic Roper family, intermarried with More's, whose family home in Canterbury is opposite Saint Dunstan's church where More's martyred head is still enshrined.

Given these plausible connections, one can speculate at what point in his career the young Tallis may have encountered this gloss by Erasmus on *Corinthians* 14: 19:

> Saint Paul says he would rather speak five words with a reasonable meaning in them than ten thousand in an unknown tongue. They chant nowadays in our churches in what is an unknown tongue and nothing else, while you will not hear a sermon once in six months telling people to amend their lives. Modern church music is so constructed that the congregation cannot hear one distinct word. The choristers themselves do not understand what they are singing, yet according to priests and monks it constitutes the whole of religion. Why will they not listen to Saint Paul? In college or monastery it is still the same: music, nothing but music. There was no music in Saint Paul's time. Words were then pronounced plainly. Words nowadays mean nothing. They are mere sounds striking upon the ear, and men are to leave their work and go to church to listen to worse noises than were ever heard in Greek or Roman theatre. Money must be raised to buy organs and train boys to squeal, and to learn no other thing that is good for them . . They have so much of it in England that the monks attend to nothing else. A set of creatures who ought to be lamenting their sins fancy they can please God by gurgling in their throats. Boys are kept in the English Benedictine colleges solely and simply to sing morning hymns to the Virgin. If they want music let them sing psalms like rational beings and not too many of those.

It's worth noting that the catalogue of the library of Dover Priory is probably the most intellectually sophisticated of all mediaeval library catalogues surviving in England, with its complex but lucid arrangement of cross-referenced bibliographical information on its 450 manuscripts, each comprising several individually specified and listed texts. It was compiled in 1389 by John Whytefeld (see Corpus of British Medieval Library

Catalogues: *Dover Priory*, edited William P. Stoneman, 1999). One hopes the 20-year-old Tallis as a lay servant of the Priory had access to the library, including Erasmus texts.

Moreover, it seems that Tallis may at some point have claimed possession of the manuscript which included Leonel Power's 'tretis' on teaching boy chorister's, as Jeffrey Pulver once suggested:

> The treatise which entitles Power to a place among the theorists is contained in the British Museum manuscript Lansdowne 763, that interesting volume of Latin and English musical tracts which Thomas Tallis probably found at Waltham Abbey and appropriated when he became organist there, removing it with himself at the time of the dissolution of the greater monasteries (1539-40).

Dover Priory which was suppressed in 1535, and Tallis's first post was dissolved with it, seems as likely a location for his finding Power's treatise as Waltham Abbey.

Parker's Psalter

As with the earlier discussion of selected works by Power and Dunstable Tallis's *oeuvre* can be seen as containing compositions which encompass a spectrum of possible relations between text and music. It was characteristic of the changes made under the aegis of the Reformation that an emphasis was initially placed upon the legibility and audibility of the liturgical texts with the subordination of the music to a merely supporting role. One instance of this is the work of the first Elizabethan Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker, who undertook a new translation of the Psalms into contemporary English. The publication of his renditions was accompanied by minimal musical settings of the Psalms provided by Tallis, by then a senior member of the Royal Chapel choir.

The *Whole Psalter Translated Into English Metre,* printed by John Day in 1567 may even have been prepared under Tallis's own supervision. On January 21, 1575, Queen Elizabeth was to grant Tallis and Byrd the monopoly for printing music and for supplying music paper in England, the first instance of letters patent issued for that purpose. *The Whole Psalter* included nine harmonized tunes by Tallis designed to fit the entire psalter, as translated by Archbishop Parker into English rhyming verse. The quality of Parker's verse may be judged by an extract from his preface 'To the reader':

> Accent in place: your voyce as needth,
> note number, poynte, and time:
> Both lyfe and grace: good reading breedth,
> flat verse it reysth sublime.
> Obserue the trayne: the ceasure marke,

To rest with note in close:
Rythmedogrell playne: as dogs do barke,
ye make it els to lose.
Reade oft inough: well spell the lyne,
less iarr to heare by vse:
If verse be rough: no fault is myne,
if ye the eare abuse.
But princepall thing your lute to tune,
that hart may sing in corde:
Your voyce and string: so fine to prune,
to loue and serue the Lorde.

Whether Parker was being consciously self-deprecating in his references to 'flat verse' and 'Rythmedogrell' is unclear.

Each psalm in the psalter is preceded by a short 'Argument' in verse. That for Psalm 1 is:

This Psalme in sence of men both good and bad:
Shewth difference of men both good and bad:
It shewth their fruites their endes both glad & sad
Their hartes pursuites their endes both glad & sad

Advice is given on matching psalms to an appropriate tune. Each psalm and each tune is given an 'accent': 'the sharp [acute] accent to ioyfull songes and tunes, The graue accent to sad, the circumflect accent to indifferent' :

The nature of the eyght tunes.
~ 1 The first is méeke: deuout to sée,
\ 2 The second sad: in maiesty.
\ 3 The third doth rage: and roughly brayth.
/ 4 The fourth doth fawne: and flattry playth,
/ 5 The fyfth delight: and laugheth the more,
\ 6 The sixt bewayleth: it wéepeth full sore,
\ 7 The seuenth tredeth stoute: in froward race,
~ 8 The eyghte goeth milde: in modest pace.

One might recall the sigla in Osbern's treatise, but it is now emotional mood rather than relative pitch which is to be indicated.

Some commentators have found it unexpected that the 'Catholic' Tallis should have contributed to this quintessentially 'Anglican' project, thereby becoming, in a 19th-century phrase, the 'Father of English church music'. It may therefore be worth recalling the possible connections with Warham and the Erasmus circle, as well perhaps as his early experience of writing music accessible to a Lady Chapel congregation. In the debate over the religious affiliation of Tallis it can be forgotten that there was a distinctive

strand of what one might call reformed catholicism of which Erasmus had been an influential exponent.

However, once the ancient Latin liturgical texts were to be systematically transformed into an accessible contemporary English, the question arose not only of how exactly to translate the words but sometimes what sense to make of them in the first place. Parker, who also supervised the translation of parts of the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament for the 1568 *Bishops' Bible*, was not a venerable Jerome, protected from scrutiny by centuries of familiar repetition. If Scholastic enquiries constituted one threat to received doctrinal formulations, an English-speaking liturgy risked a different challenge.

A comparison can be made with a later moment. I have elsewhere suggested (*Bishops and Writers,* edited Adrian Hastings 1977) that the long-delayed and very belated official acceptance in the 1960s of national vernaculars as finally permitted liturgical languages for world-wide Roman Catholic church services was a partial trigger for a degree of disaffiliation and undermining of unquestioned acquiescence in credal statements which had previously been to an extent safely wrapped in the impregnable protection of a scholastic Latin vocabulary. In other words, literally, congregations understood what they had been saying, and it did not necessarily make sense.

One theological response at that time was to propose that even credal statements were not after all to be taken as cogent propositional affirmations, but primarily as expressions of identity by a believing community. To be a believer was rather more like participation in choral singing, or other modes of shared cultural or group affiliation, than a thoughtful personal endorsement of any specific statement or affirmation about the nature of ultimate reality. The phrase 'I believe in God' thus became far more a statement about the I than about God. It was then unclear just how a community as a whole could have the collective attribute of believing in anything if the individuals comprising it were primarily affirming their membership in that believing community. The verb 'believe in' was accordingly interpreted rather as 'trust in', though precisely in what could remain unclarified. As the Dominican Fergus Kerr once remarked (*New Blackfriars*, December 1973):

> The flight to biblical studies and patrology, or to sociology and poetry, so typical of the opposing wings in the new generation . . must lead to an *impasse* in the long run unless we face up to the philosophical problems that all these various disciplines ignore.

common prayer

Successive *Books of Common Prayer* from 1549 to 1662 commendably specified that the perhaps over-familiar 'Apostles Creed' should be replaced

on specific feast days by what is still termed in Latin *Quicunque vult*, otherwise known as the creed of St Athanasius, which the entire congregation was instructed to recite.

Yet anybody who seriously attended to the English words they were saying in that 'credo', might well have felt that they were opening themselves to intractable intellectual problems. One version of the text reads in part:

> For there is one person of the father, another of the son: and another of the Holy Ghost.
> But the godhead of the father, of the son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.
> Such as the father is, such is the son: and such is the Holy Ghost.
> The father uncreate, the son uncreate: and the Holy Ghost uncreate.
> The father incomprehensible, the son incomprehensible:
> and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.

And we are assured that:

> As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated:
> but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.

Quite so.

Even long after the demise of erosive Scholastic analysis, it might have been more reassuring simply to listen to Wylkynson's *Credo* as it gradually obliterated any audible sense of the words to be believed in.

Spem In Alium

Several of the compositions written by Tallis for the liturgy in its various versions during the reigns of Henry, Mary, and Elizabeth rather mechanically alternate between plainchant and harmonised part-voices as the text proceeds from stanza to stanza, with a corresponding change between clearly audible and comprehensible text and its partial muffling by over-lapping voices. There is no rationale suggested by the texts themselves for this oscillation of attention, while the treatment of the text in a number of the more elaborate hymns probably written for performance in recusant households would clearly have prompted the disapproval of Erasmus.

However, at one extreme end of the spectrum of relations between word and text, Tallis's *Spem In Alium* in forty voices more or less overwhelms any attempt by a listener to attend to the words being sung, though this extraordinary composition is so familiar now that in some accounts of its music any significance of the Latin text is simply by-passed. The text is a brief passage, a prayer which had provided a respond for a particular Sunday Matins. Here is the complete text:

Spem in alium nunquam habui praeter in te,
Deus Israel qui irasceris, et propitus eris,
et omnia peccata hominum in tribulatione dimittis
Domine Deus, creator coeli et terrae, respice humilitatem.

I have never put my hope in any other but you, God of Israel, who will be angry and yet become again gracious, and who forgives all the sins of suffering man. Lord God, creator of heaven and earth, look upon our lowliness.

Given the extraordinary ambition of this magnificent display of virtuoso professionalism one might be tempted to think that Tallis is provoking a wry smile on the face of God by ending with a phrase which could be taken to refer to his own humility (*humilitatem*). It is not that simple.

Various issues raised by *Spem in alium* can be outlined. Thanks to several dedicated scholarly studies, we can no longer be at all sure of the date of the composition, the occasion for which it was written, Tallis's motivation for writing it, and the reason for the choice of that text, partly because we can't even be clear as to what the text itself means.

It is associated with the book of *Judith* since it appears as a respond in the Sarum liturgy after a reading from *Judith* in Matins on a particular Sunday. The *Spem* text is not however a direct quotation from the book of *Judith* though it has been interpreted as a prayer imagined as spoken by Judith before she implements her plan to assassinate Holofernes, in a murder committed in order to save Israel. The book of *Judith* is itself a problematic text, since any original Hebrew is not extant, there are three different Greek versions, and the Vulgate is a revision of a different Latin redaction and an Aramaic paraphrase. Regarded as canonical in the west from 382 CE but in the east only from 682 and relegated to apocryphal status by the Reformed churches, the book is now regarded as wholly fictional, incorporating as it does impossible historical and geographical elements. In addition, the Sarum rite had itself been discontinued after the Henrican Reformation in England so the very choice of this version of the liturgical text is distinctly odd .

The several questions about Tallis's composition are interrelated. One hypothesis dates the piece to 1573 as celebrating Queen Elizabeth's fortieth birthday, and therefore as an expression of Tallis's loyalty to his sovereign, though the choice of text seems not particularly appropriate to a birthday. A variant sees the formidably ambitious work as in effect a pitch (forgive the pun) to secure the monopoly on printing music which was granted in 1575. In one reading, the text concerning Judith saving the Israelites from the tyranny of Holofernes by decapitating him provides a biblical figure for Queen Elizabeth defeating any attempted invasion by hostile Catholic

powers led by the Pope. In these scenarios, Tallis is declaring his patriotic loyalty to the crown over his Catholic religious affiliation.

On the contrary, a different argument situates *Spem* as celebrating the Catholic Queen Mary's determined action in July 1553 by overcoming Lady Jane Grey and executing Northampton. Another hypothesis argues that the work was written in support of a Catholic conspiracy against Elizabeth, whether the Ridolfi plot in 1571 or some other, with the conspirators prepared, like Judith, to commit a heinous sin for what they regarded as a justifiable cause – in which case the final phrase '*respice humilitatem*' expresses, as if Judith's own prayer, an anticipatory remorse for a necessary act. In that case, somewhat implausibly, the forty-part piece was first performed, presumably in rather risky secrecy, at the household of an aristocratic Catholic conspirator.

A less sensational account simply has the Duke of Norfolk challenging English composers to match or excel a 40-part composition by a visiting Italian in 1567, Alessandro Striggio, which may or probably may not have been performed in London. Tallis won this supposed contest and was suitably rewarded with a gold chain by Norfolk.

A more personal interpretation of the *Spem* text, perhaps compatible with any of these accounts, would read the words as simply the sombre reflection of a man who had served four monarchs with alternating and incompatible religious beliefs, and witnessed a recent history in which God had seemingly alternated between being angry and gracious, but throughout had remained the only firm hope for Tallis himself, unlike the temporary monarchs he had served, whether sincerely, hypocritically, or resignedly.

To complicate matters further, we know that a version of *Spem in alium* but with a quite different English text was performed at the Coronation of Prince Henry as Prince of Wales in 1610 and again after Henry's early death at the similar ceremony for his brother Prince Charles in 1616. A manuscript of the score used for these occasions was the earliest known version of *Spem* until displaced as the primary source only in recent years.

Any performance or recording of this extraordinary composition has in any case to make complex decisions as to the pitch of the voices, and therefore the choice of choral personnel, and whether some 'voices' should be instrumental rather than vocal, what arrangement of choirs (10 x 4; 5 x 8; 5 x 2+2…?), and what physical organisation of the performing space (a semi-circle, an octagon, an antiphonal opposition, . . ?). Any recording of *Spem* involves detailed technical and logistical as well as musical decisions, which can be illustrated in various YouTube videos, for example a performance in Strasbourg cathedral, which might be usefully compared with an ambitious reconstructing by I Fagiolini and others of Gabrieli's 1612 Vespers, organised by Robert Hollingsworth in 2012.

With a kind of Benjaminian irony, however, modern playback software on a digital sound system can variously adjust, modify, and minutely personalise an individual's listening experience of any recording, thereby

overriding meticulous production decisions about pitch, balance, volume, or even the aural space regarded as appropriate. Some recordings have also put into circulation not only alternative contrafact texts but, for example, a single performer's individual voice digitally over-dubbed 40 times, or even a version of *Spem* played on 40 guitars.

Spem has yet another aspect which has not escaped those scholars interested in such matters as proportionality in the works of Dunstable, and one can assume that Tallis might be included among their number:

> An interesting feature of *Spem in alium* is that its total length is 69 longs (a long being two breves). This is a cryptogram; the same number is arrived at by taking Tallis' name, ascribing each of the letters of the Latin alphabet a number (A=1, B=2 etc.) and summing the values. Perhaps it is not too fanciful to imagine that Tallis 'signed' the work in a way that ensures he is fully bound up with his *summa* for perpetuity?

Yet if Tallis was inscribing his signature, what precisely was he claiming possession of and responsibility for?

tell us

Let me return to the main issue raised for me by *Spem in alium*. The complex listening process makes any attentive following of the text almost impossible, with only fleeting glimpses of significant words. Since the words are largely obliterated an audience might as well listen instead to the contrafact version in English without registering the substitution or perhaps mistakenly regarding it as a translation of the Latin text. All of which prompts some further thought about the role of texts in general.

In the Sarum liturgy the short *Spem* text was probably written or chosen to comment in some way upon the liturgical reading from *Judith* but we now consider the book of *Judith* as itself a kind of contrafact, a rewriting and displacement of a supposed but actually fictitious history, constructed to provide a suitable quasi-historical context for a commendable religious female figure whose firm belief in God's Providence and a commitment to brave action in defence of Israel offers a model for any actual threat of invasion.

The brief text of *Spem* itself is a further fiction, in that it was not said or performed by Judith in the book of *Judith* though she is represented as singing what may have been a previous oral composition incorporated into the imagined narrative, perhaps not unlike the *Magnificat* in that respect. We have no idea who composed either *Judith* or the specific *Spem* liturgical text itself, or why, though it is clearly open to the interpretations or applications suggested by those who support the hypotheses of *Spem* as associated with murder or conspiracy, in that it can indeed be read as combining remorse

and hope and can be treated as a quotation indicating a possible application or expropriation of a past situation to suggest a present counterpart.

Once, however, it is clear that we simply do not know the date, occasion, context, or the intention of Tallis in setting the Judith text to such extravagantly composed music, can we listen to the piece without at some level wanting to know about those matters? Which is obviously different from wanting to know what day of the week a particular psalm would have been chanted in the monastic liturgy, or on which Saint's feast day a specific response might have been sung. Any answers to those queries could be found in the *Liber Usualis* or some similar set of liturgical instructions.What the musical content of a liturgical composition might be taken to 'mean' is then a matter of understanding its place in the overall function of the liturgy.

Whereas in the case of *Spem in alium* does it matter to any 'meaning' of the composition not only which account of its context is historically correct or even plausible but also how Tallis himself regarded the function of this composition? Only he could tell us that. The piece itself obviously does not. Any relation of the piece to the Ridolfi plot or to Elizabeth's birthday is not inscribed in the composition itself. One might favour the probably apocryphal account of Norfolk offering a prize for such a composition, but this is also a way of bypassing the significance of Tallis selecting this text in the first place. Does it matter why he wrote this piece and what it meant for him? Or can we 'just listen' to it?

author-ity

Step back a little. One theological rationale for the dissolution of the monasteries was the notion that the children of God should need no mediators in order to talk to and indeed hear from their divine Father. Not only was it now rejected, theologically as well as financially, that monks should be paid to chant and pray on someone else's behalf (*pace* of course exceptions for some aristocratic chantry-type arrangements) but it was also the policy of the new religious establishment to remove as far as possible that clutter of saints who had acted as personalised conduits to the divine. That this reduced the provision of holy days (holidays) was, as an economic side-effect, a further incentive for employers to combat the ever-popular 'Saint Monday'.

The *Book of Common Prayer* included as exceptions feasts for the Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary, for 'St Michael and all Angels', and the odd privileged national saint such as St George. Whether the removal of saints from the liturgy and their relics from shrines implied that they had also been personally removed from heaven itself was a moot point. But during some more ideological phases of the ongoing and oscillating religious transformations in England, those departed dear ones occupying now discredited places in purgatory, for whom so many mediaeval prayers had

been assigned and indulgences purchased, were presumably given by implicit Royal command a retrospective free pass to their final heavenly destinations. Or otherwise.

In any case, the removal of saintly intermediaries meant that while the clergy still performed the role of calling upon the congregation to pray or to sing, their own function as intermediaries was more a matter of leading a chorus than performing on its behalf. They were now given new versions of God-given words to say and sing, by the varying commands of successive monarchs, and though the new authorised and required texts were still composed in part from ancient prophets and other messengers of God, many of the translated words were now decided by an earthly committee, endeavouring to offer us suitably dignified English to recite. One of those who helped provide the English of the King James Bible was, for example, a Dutchman now buried in the Cathedral near the north porch.

One aspect of the transition from the late mediaeval to the Reformation liturgy was thus a change in the credited authorship, and indeed author-ity, of the received liturgical texts. The traditional and largely anonymous Latin texts were dependent upon or derived from a translation which had become almost anonymous and sacrosanct, dissociated from its main translator, St Jerome. However, the period of the Reformation, particularly in England, saw a rapidly changing implementation and imposition of several different versions, authorised and unauthorised, of the English translations of the Bible text itself and also competitive revisions of what was known as the *Book of Common Prayer*.

At the core of this development was an underlying shift in the very notion of divine 'authorship', such that it was now the monarch or somehow the nation itself which was the source of authorisation of a vernacular liturgical or biblical text. The title page of the 1535 edition of the *Great Bible* showed the monarch, King Henry, as the intermediary between God and the people, handing out copies of his approved new translation to be disseminated down through the ranks. It was symptomatic of the period that between consecutive editions and revisions the figures receiving the Bible from the Royal hands had to be replaced by updated substitutes as Royal servants were ruthlessly replaced.

That several Bibles were now in the vernacular of each national polity was itself one factor in the latent but increasingly dominant notion that all composition was fundamentally shaped by national characteristics, that there was a national literature and indeed – for chauvinist musicologists like Davey – a 'national music'.

Individual readers, with their preferred printed editions of Bible texts, sometimes determinedly *scriptura sola*, without any explanatory *glossa* or commentary, were sometimes left with either a simpliste literalist understanding of the biblical text or seeking personally attractive connections between dispersed verses. As George Herbert's poem sequence *The Temple* was to put it : 'This verse seeks that'.

One could perhaps summarise that instead of the act of prayer resting upon and being justified by a customary belief in doctrines concerning the divinity, which were articulated in an 'ancient' received liturgy and language, it was increasingly one's own specific belief in God which was generated by and more dependent upon the practice of personal prayer. Moreover, one might suggest that it was often a personal belief in a preferred version of the book of God, the Bible, which served to underpin a belief in God itself.

This recalls the counter-intuitive response offered to those who seek guidance from spiritual advisers in a situation of personal doubts. The advice given is to pray, with an assurance that the misgivings, even about the very existence of God, will somehow be resolved. As the underlying function of the daily chanting of the liturgical office had also arguably been to reinforce a belief in divinity itself. Several aspects of these issues might be encapsulated in an anecdote. During a conversation in a pub with a fundamentalist English evangelical, I commented that a New Testament quotation he relied upon was a doubtfully tendentious translation of the Greek. I was met with the unanswerable riposte: "If English was good enough for God, it's good enough for me."

One minor but intriguing implicit casualty of the Europe-wide vernacular Reformation was therefore any surviving wisp of a notion that one might easily join the heavenly *chorus angelorum*. Which language was now the favoured dialect for an eternal after-life of choral singing? Would a post-mortem 15th-century Englishman find himself singing different words from those even of a later 17th-century English speaker, let alone a dead 16th-century German Lutheran (if they were allowed in at all)? Perhaps Saint Gregory's 'Angli' were no longer natural-born 'Angeli' after all. The passage in *Corinthians* upon which Erasmus commented had concerned the Pentecostal speaking in tongues. Would the final apocalypse involve a kind of Pentecost in reverse, enabling everyone to speak a new common language? Perhaps each practising aspirant to an immortality of heavenly praise would now have to learn not Latin but whatever the pre-Babel language had once been. There was even a flurry of scholarly studies on the possible language of the pre-Adamites. Or was text-less vocalising the only practical heavenly solution. Meanwhile, the function and status of author-ship, whether of text or of music, was changing.

'early music'

In his chapter on music in *A History of Canterbury Cathedral* edited by Pat Collinson and others, Roger Bowers comments that:

> By the early 18th century there was very little left in the Cathedral archives or elsewhere of the enormous number of musical manuscripts which had once proliferated in mediaeval England, though collecting musical manuscripts in the age of printed scores was not unknown.

> Indeed, one of the most extraordinary music collectors of all time in England was William Gostling, a minor canon who lived in the Cathedral precincts. His collection was eventually dispersed at auction, and it is best known now only for the so-called *Gostling Manuscript,* which includes a great deal of Purcell scores in beautifully transcribed handwritten copies. However, Gostling would appear to have had no great interest in retrieving pre-Reformation music manuscripts. It was perhaps historically symptomatic that he is even better known today for writing what can be described as the first provincial tourist guide, to the city and Cathedral of Canterbury: *A Walk Around Canterbury*.

We followed William Gostling's walk a little earlier, as a precursor for my own wandering work. Eighteenth-century antiquarian interest in music eventually evolved into what became known as the 'Early Music' movement which included the modern retrieval and editing of manuscripts and attempts at 'authentic' performances. Among its influential practitioners was an ex-chorister from Canterbury Cathedral, Alfred Deller, and one of the most successful exponents of early music was Harry Christopher of The Sixteen, also himself once a chorister in the Canterbury Cathedral choir.

Mark Deller, Alfred's son, organised the Stour Festival of music for many years, held in the church of Boughton Aluph, near Canterbury, with a consistent programming preference for 'early' but not necessarily mediaeval music. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Festival it was no surprise that the showcase piece selected was Tallis's *Spem in alium*. It was a memorable occasion when dozens of singers of considerable professional eminence, who had previously performed at the Stour Festival, assembled on the platform for the evening's final performance. Counting the singers and finding only 39 present, Mark Deller turned to the audience in mock panic to ask if there was someone present who could make up the desired 40 voices. He was answered from the audience by James Bowman, the celebrated countertenor, who joined those on the platform to make up the required numbers. An appropriate gesture.

Yet one wonders just how many different interpretations of the *Spem* that was being sung were to be found, however half-formed or semi-explicit, among the many performers and the packed audience that evening.

art emotion

Let us move towards a conclusion. I have so far been considering some perhaps neglected reasons why mediaeval monks chanted for several hours a day, and how liturgical texts set to music were often effectively made indecipherable. Several other issues intrigue me and I was tempted to entitle this segment on the choir "believing, in music". The phrase might simply refer to belief-contents set to music, or alternatively to some music as providing a compensatory response for an abandonment or loss of religious

belief. If music can constitute an act of prayer and 'heaven' is supposedly characterised by eternal or *tota simul* music, would a resurrected body have to have perfect pitch? One can suggest an array of Scholastic *quaestiones*, which could probably now be handed over to psychologists or neurologists, or to science-fiction novelists rather than theologians.

However, one question still seems worth pursuing, if inadequately. Whether specific modes of music relate to particular 'passions' has long been examined, was considered by Plato and Aristotle, and debated in Scholastic Paris. If we hear the *Jubilate!* or the *Gaudeamus igitur* sung with sufficient fervour and enthusiasm, do we almost necessarily find ourselves responding with an emotion of jubilation or celebration? The libretto of Handel's *Alexander's Feast* presumes some such effect but does even his own music work that way? What if I hear on the radio a triumphantly exultant piece of music which I discover, from an announcement made only at the end of the broadcast, was composed to celebrate a colonial atrocity? In Krakow during the rise of Solidarnosce I heard a cheerful band playing to accompany a demonstration. Tempted to join the demo, I asked about the music, to be told it was the *Pilsudski Marching Song*, popular with proto-fascists in 1930s Poland. I did not join the demonstration.

But what if I am invited to participate in singing the *Te Deum laudamus* or a setting of the *Credo*? A perhaps apocryphal anecdote concerns an Oxford don whose distinctively loud voice was heard only intermittently during a church service, as he selectively joined in the recitation of *some* passages of the creed. More generally, might the phrase "believing, in music" indicate the musical expression of a specific 'feeling', that of "believing"? A suggestion perhaps implicit in the trajectory I have been tracing.

Modify the question. Can an emotion generated or stimulated by a piece of music not only involve specific 'feelings' but also imply an 'affective object', something towards which our 'passions' or 'affections' are directed, some 'object' appropriate to that response? Consider T. S. Eliot's coinage, 'objective correlative', in his essay on *Hamlet* :

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion . .

This suggests a process or procedure by an artist or writer, and might even apply to the Lego-like construction of a feast-day liturgical office. But Eliot then switches focus to the reader or audience:

> . . such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.

In his 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Eliot proposed a complementary notion, that of an 'art emotion'. He comments on a quotation from Shakespeare:

> *And now methinks I could e'en chide myself*
> *For doating on her beauty, though her death*
> *Shall be revenged after no common action.*
> *Does the silkworm expend her yellow labours*
> *For thee? For thee does she undo herself?*
> *Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships*
> *For the poor benefit of a bewildering minute?*
> *Why does yon fellow falsify highways,*
> *And put his life between the judge's lips,*
> *To refine such a thing—keeps horse and men*
> *To beat their valours for her?…*

> In this passage (as is evident if it is taken in its context) there is a combination of positive and negative emotions: an intensely strong attraction toward beauty and an equally intense fascination by the ugliness which is contrasted with it and which destroys it. This balance of contrasted emotion is in the dramatic situation to which the speech is pertinent, but that situation alone is inadequate to it. This is, so to speak, the structural emotion, provided by the drama. But the whole effect, the dominant tone, is due to the fact that a number of floating feelings, having an affinity to this emotion by no means superficially evident, have combined with it to give us a new art emotion.

We might also adapt the remark by Wordsworth in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* claiming a subtle but significant development in poetry:

> one . . circumstance which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day . . [is] that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling.

If the 'feeling' or 'art emotion' generated by music constitutes the core 'situation' of attending a concert or listening to a performance, might a particular 'feeling' of 'believing' now constitute for many people the 'importance [of] the action and situation' of attending a religious service?

Another remark by Wordsworth could be further adapted to apply to the relation between listener and composer, but reversed:

> It will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time

perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs.

Among the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* was *Lines written above Tintern Abbey,* arising from a memorable trip to a picturesque ruin and presented in the poem as prompting a somewhat vacuous mystical emotion but not including any direct reflection upon that historical 'situation' of the dissolution of the monasteries.

As it happens, Wordsworth visited Canterbury Cathedral on a number of occasions and a much later poem sequence entitled *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* includes an execrable poem (3.42) entitled 'Cathedrals, Etc.' which begins 'Open your gates, ye everlasting Piles!'**.** His sister Dorothy duly recorded in her journals the emotional effect that listening to music in the Cathedral had upon them both.

So let us return to music. Can I appropriate and adapt these remarks to explore a response, especially today, to 'religious' musical composition? On Eliot's account, a competent composer might write a moving *Requiem* simply on the orders of a commercial client, and an atheist could compose a serviceable Catholic *Mass* suite, by finding the musical 'formula of that *particular* emotion'. Several instances of such composers might be cited.

But what of the listener to such music? It seems possible for some people to listen with responsive emotions to a performance of the *Dies Irae* or Mozart's *Requiem* without having any understanding of the text and still less a belief in what the words of either piece actually say. It may not matter to them what the Latin they are listening to even means.

As mentioned in relation to Tallis, a music festival founded in 1962 by Alfred Deller, once a chorister at Canterbury Cathedral, still takes place annually in Boughton Aluph church near Canterbury. I remember a performance there of Bach's Saint Matthew *Passion*, which was met with rapturously enthusiastic applause. I remarked to a friend that the audience seemed remarkably joyous despite the text having just concluded by exhorting them to weep in contrition for their sins. The Alto sings: '*O selige Gebeine, Seht, wie ich euch mit Buß und Reu beweine, Dass euch mein Fall in solche Not gebracht!*', 'O sacred bones, see how I weep for you with penance and remorse, That my fall has brought you into such distress!' and the Chorus responds: '*Wir setzen uns mit Tränen nieder Und rufen dir im Grabe zu: Ruhe sanfte, sanfte ruh! Ruht, ihr ausgesognen Glieder! Euer Grab und Leichenstein Soll dem ängstlichen Gewissen Ein bequemes Ruhekissen Und der Seelen Ruhstatt sein. Höchst vergnügt schlummern da die Augen ein*. 'We sit down with tears And call to you in your tomb, Rest gently, gently rest! Rest, your exhausted limbs! . . For our anguished conscience shall be a pillow that gives peace and comfort And the place where our souls find rest. With the greatest content there our eyes will close in sleep.' (English translation by Francis Browne.)

The wildly applauding audience, I commented on that occasion, were surely relishing an 'art emotion', not lamenting their responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ. I then realised that my friend was indeed weeping.

affective object

One might claim that any act of remembering necessarily has an 'object', that which we remember, even when our memory is faulty and what we remember never actually occurred. A memory necessarily generates an 'object' in the very process of remembering. Think of Proust. Kierkegaard explored a distinction between 'fear' which requires an 'object' and 'dread' in which the lack of a definite 'object' can intensify a sense of panic or terror. Is there a similar distinction to be pursued in the case of listening to a music performance? Think of the ominous music in a horror movie. If music attempts to stimulate a specific 'structural emotion', or a particular 'feeling' is generated by the music, is an 'affective object' thereby constructed in our very act of appropriate listening? Or is that solely a matter of personal response or cultural upbringing?

If someone proclaims "Rejoice!" and I can register nothing about which to rejoice (think of Margaret Thatcher on the steps of Number 10), is this similar to being musically invited to rejoice in Christ's resurrection or incarnation even though I don't believe those events happened? Conversely, does 'believing' in those 'events' or 'situations' generate a specific emotional response, an 'affective object'? We can surely feel ourselves rejoicing in a novel's fictional happy ending or being moved by the death of a character in a play or film, and it is clearly possible for some people attending a funeral to generate in themselves the emotions appropriate to mourning, even if the person being buried had meant little to them in life. Many amateur choral societies seem enthusiastically happy to sing Handel's *Messiah* without at all believing in one.

Now pose the issue slightly differently in relation to the liturgy. The emotions we are at least invited to have at different times within the liturgical year are associated with particular feasts. The prompts to our feelings at Christmas – the joyful acclamation of *Hodie!* – are not those of Easter Sunday, though *Haec Dies* is used in celebration and exultation on both occasions. The emotions appropriate to these times of liturgical joy are ostensibly different from the emotions we are invited to participate in during the forty days of Lent or the ceremonies of Good Friday. The point is obviously relevant to secular occasions. It would seem highly inappropriate to celebrate a wedding by singing a dirge, though a raucous rendition of 'Look on the bright side' at the funeral of the *Monty Python* actor Eric Idle could indeed be seen as an apt choice (not least because he wrote the song).

When a musical piece is composed as part of an act of liturgical practice, could one experience an 'emotion' appropriate to praying to God, or

rejoicing in the resurrection, or lamenting a crucified Lord, but without actually 'believing' in such an 'affective object' of the 'prayerful' emotion. Could one emotionally respond to such music 'independently' of any affective object, or does 'praying' itself generate a certain kind of 'affective object', developed as it were inherently from the very act of 'praying'? (Think perhaps of Anselm's prayers.) Daily monastic singing might then be regarded not primarily as an 'expression' of faith but rather as the musical manufacturing of an emotion of 'believing' which itself constructs the affective object of belief. (*Musica quaerens fidem*?).

Can 'God' remain as the affective object of responding to some music even if no longer 'believed' to be its 'objective' correlative? Would that be, in Eliot's term, a 'new art emotion'. Perhaps even a historically 'new' 'religious' emotion, indicating a now widespread change in cultural sensibility or structure of feeling.

In so far as the affective object of liturgical or 'sacred' music is ultimately God 'himself' what difference is made to the act of responding to such music if God is in effect regarded by the listeners, or perhaps also the performers, as a projection or fiction, with the music as itself constructing its own affective response. As in reading or reciting a love poem, the addressee, whether real or imagined, is the affective object constructed by the reading of the poem itself. One might here also recall Anselm's letters. Something of this possibility is indicated by Eadmer's appeal to the Marian liturgy to support a distinctive theological claim concerning the Virgin Mary. Could something similar be said of music in glorification and worship of God. Might that be, at least for some and perhaps for many people now, the primary or perhaps only residue of what used to be a 'belief in' God? A paradigm shift, a 'mutation' in Eadmer's sense.

'sacred' music

Let me recap. On one account, monastic liturgical music could once have provided emotional reinforcement of a doctrinal belief system primarily conveyed in the sense of the words being sung, sometimes by involving or supporting a pensive meditation upon the meaning of those words, or by a musical accompaniment enhancing the emotional impact of the words. Power and Tallis provided some examples. Particularly in some complex polyphony, however, a text could be so subordinated to the requirements of the music that the words become effectively displaced, even incomprehensible, and rendered almost unnecessary. As in examples from Dunstable, Wylkynson, and some polytextual pieces in honour of Becket. A text might still be intrinsic to the musical texture but only in so far as the words have been transformed into a primarily musical component.

There were elements of this development in the way Perotin can seemingly treat individual syllables of the text as material to be manipulated in much the same way that sequences of notes can be repeated, rearranged,

or permutated. Dunstable sometimes seems to organise the syllables of his texts as essentially sounds, the meaning of which can be sacrificed or dispensed with to fit a strictly musical calculation, as mathematically measurable and manipulable as the 'longs' and 'shorts' of his notes. While a sequence of notes can be slowed down or accelerated, and a musical resolution can be postponed or suspended, to have the opening syllable of a word elaborated for several minutes ("Jo.....") before the next syllable is audible ("..ha...") renders the unfolding word indeterminate and unintelligible until the final syllable is provided ("..nnes").

A complex overlapping of the same words sung by multiple voices, as in Robert Wylkynson's 13-part canon *Jesus autem transiens* or Tallis's *Spem in alium*, can have the effect of re-ordering the words or individual syllables, almost to foreshadow the permutations of a 12-tone row. Such a text is no longer an intelligible verbal statement or utterance but subsumed into whatever 'meaning' is claimed for the music. Unless the text is already familiar, as it might be to the performers, the listener's comprehension of the words is sacrificed to the requirements of the musical schema, the effect of which is almost entirely affective.

Modern composers may sometimes set to music texts which evoke or hark back to a previous 'religious' musical idiom but may not be intended by the composer to carry any definite devotional, still less specific theological, sense. An intriguing instance might be Avro Pärt's 1976 *In spe* in which only the vowels "i", "e" and "o" of the *Kyrie eleison* were deployed in a complex overlapping of sounds which presumably traded upon the significance summoned up by the echoes of the *Kyrie* voiced by the singers but without any directly intelligible content. Saint Dunstan might have been intrigued. A performance thereby had as its affective object whatever emotion was generated by the musical mouthing of apparently meaningless vowels, while at the same time the very gesture of setting such a quasi-text could be interpreted as a reference to the censorship and suppression of religious belief. Pärt later re-titled several developments of the piece to refer to Psalm 137 (*By the rivers of Babylon*).

When the Hilliard ensemble recorded Pärt's *Tabula Rasa* in Estonian and a member of the ensemble was asked about the performer's own relation to the un-translated text of the piece he responded: 'Well, God knows the words', a comment reminiscent of some explanations of stained-glass windows being placed so high in the clerestory that only God can see them.

A number of late 20th-century English-speaking composers drawn to the task of 'sacred' composition have tended to set their music to texts derived variously from Russian Orthodox or patristic Greek theologians, ancient Sanskrit or Far Eastern mantra. One might remark, I suppose, that English audiences faced with German cantatas or Italian operas have long accepted not understanding the words and it has hardly mattered to them whether compositions are in Latin or some utterly alien tongue.

The wonderful 2012 novel *Infinity : The Story of a Moment* by the poly-lingual but England-based Gabriel Josipovici provides a partly comic reflection upon the work of a composer not unlike Giacinto Scelsi whose music provides a framework for a literary work which in its own practice probes the relationship between words and the unsayable, and is perhaps also a tribute to the late Jonathan Harvey and to Peter Maxwell Davies. It was perhaps predictable that one of the compositions imagined in Josipovici's novel was promptly actualised and recorded for YouTube by an admiring reader. It consisted of a single note played repetitively upon the piano. (Compare Scelsi's *Quattro pezzi su una nota sola*, 'Four Pieces on a single note', 1959, for twenty-five musicians). Did this homage make Josipovici a composer? *Infinity* is one of the few novels concerning music which might be read alongside Thomas Mann's *Dr Faustus*, not least in its exploration of the relations between mediaeval and modern music.

Benjamin again

Reference to YouTube recordings indicates more recent developments in music composition, performance, and reception which can take us far beyond the immediate concerns of these brief comments. A 1936 essay by Walter Benjamin, whose *Arcades Project* has frequently hovered over these considerations prompted by the cathedral, can suggest a larger frame for considering the after-life of mediaeval liturgical music. Benjamin's thesis in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* was primarily concerned with the visual arts, and outlined the transformations from an image as the focus of a cult, perhaps a statue of the virgin or an altarpiece, towards the artistic artefact as a unique pictorial object, and further into an image reproducible first by printing, lithography, and photography and now by various modes of digital reproduction. Benjamin's schema could be partly adapted to the history of music, not least in relation to, and divergence from, the critique of popular and recorded music by his colleague Theodore Adorno.

Very broadly, one could claim that these three transformations have to an extent overlapped with three major periods in the history of Western European music. The first of which was created by the quasi-international institution of Roman Catholicism, the second as shaped by the court, bourgeois, and concert traditions associated with 'national' cultures, and the third the avant-garde or revolutionary moment of the early 20th century. A Benjamin way of characterising those periods or phases would be that much music in the first period is characterised by a 'sacred' aura attaching to its position within a ritual or liturgical context, that of the monastery, cathedral, or Lady Chapel, while in the second period just as the statue of the virgin or the painting of the Annunciation might end up on the walls of an art gallery or museum, so the practice of music under the auspices of the bourgeois cultural institutions can be commissioned and celebrated in the

secular context of concert hall or opera house. The third period parallels the development of photography and visual reproduction of works of art, so that all of us can have our own posters of Leonardo's *Last Supper* on our wall, to then listening to scratchy cylinders and eventually to digital tracks of music once performed in utterly different institutional contexts and now increasingly consumed as providing individual and even isolated enjoyment of musical attention or distraction. The music technology of the present period has included radio, LPs and CDs, headphones and playlists, as well as recording studios and streaming websites.

I earlier touched upon the difficulty of relying upon modern recordings for access to controversially reconstructed versions of mediaeval music, but there are also some continuities. Arranging a daily liturgical office from a collage of instructions in the *Liber Usualis* has an affinity with the widespread current procedure of constructing a composition through the digital sampling of pre-existing musical pieces and phrases. The mediaeval monastic community may have chanted for up to eight hours a day, but today's habitual or addictive music devotee may well listen to some form of music for even more time each day, with the proliferating provision of music variously broadcast, streamed, and downloaded to the ubiquitous smartphone. The very act of hearing music on permanent tap may block out any meaningful response or intelligent thinking as to its content. Perhaps by design. It's both amusing and ominous to trace a trajectory from the psalmist David playing his assumed harp, through Dunstan and his miraculous harp playing by itself, and now to the domestic angel Alexa providing endless music clips from the invisible firmament of the digital 'cloud'. Probably the nearest some of us will get to heavenly inspiration might be an apparently irremoveable musical sound in one's head: one can envisage Hell as a music tinnitus, an intolerable ear-worm, or an interminable and unavoidable customer service muzak sample eternally 'on hold'.

A claim by the technology company Dell to have produced a 'mood reading' app which measures one's emotional state, or the claim that there is an algorithm for calibrating one's general state of happiness, are presumably research projects driven by commercial considerations around 'improving' advertising jingles or mood-inducing muzak. That music should have a physical influence upon temperamental moods is perhaps no more surprising than that medical pills can do so, and it was long believed from the classical period to at least Shakespeare's plays that listening to music could contribute to our health and well-being. The physical impact of performing, or the corporeal exhilaration of listening to, music could take us from Helmholtz in the 19th century to IRCAM in the 20th.

Within these overall developments, of course, the Wordsworthian 'situation' had already long been familiar, in the 'courtly love' compositions of the troubadours and particularly in Shakespeare's collection of *Sonnets*, which provided a commercially attractive repertoire of poems suitable for

almost any occasion or 'situation', though often interpreted by critics as an encapsulated personal autobiography of experiences. The Elizabethan building of professional theatres can be seen precisely as the construction of spaces within which emotionally charged 'situations' could be played out, in actions, words, and music, in order deliberately to generate appropriate responses in a paying audience. On stage, a professional actor can masquerade as the 'affective object' of other characters' fictive emotions of love, anger, jealousy, rivalry, while 'star' performers can skilfully shape their own emotional impacts upon an admiring audience. Tracking the overlaps and consonances between early professional theatre and opera and, say, the elaborate liturgical ceremonies of the renaissance papal basilica is well beyond my competence, and I am here simply trying to sketch a multi-stranded, almost polyphonic, development.

Some literary genres are clearly derived from, are variations upon, or traceable back to, the uses of language in specific social situations, most obviously in the case of love poems. What distinguishes a love poem from an actual everyday declaration of love is not only an element of artistic craft in its composition but also that the text invites a reflexive appreciation of that craft itself, independent of any concern with a possible actual addressee. The 'literary' text foregrounds by various devices its transformation of the language deployed into what could be termed 'language squared', a use of language which highlights the language as having been 'worked' upon. A further step is when that act of highlighting the craft of the language artefact becomes itself the primary subject of a literary composition, producing a text which situates itself no longer as a possible use of language within an actual social situation but primarily in relation to other texts, specifically as 'a poem' and as 'literary' language. *Finnegans Wake* might be regarded as not merely the 'squaring' of language but as taking this process to perhaps a ninth power or degree, with its own extraordinary language as the primary matter of the work itself.

There is here a certain parallel with music. A musical composition may be rooted in a specific social 'situation', involving a particular use of certain genres of music, but a musical composition can be taken out of that social situation and performed independently of such a context. A coronation anthem may be performed without a coronation. A military march can be listened to in an armchair. The further step was when music was deliberately composed to be performed primarily in a new kind of social situation and setting which had itself been primarily or even exclusively designed for the performance and reception of music, a concert hall, opera house, or 'music festival'. The next step is when the music creates its own 'situation', its own conditions of performance and in effect becomes music about music.

We can now return to the monastic liturgy of the cathedral and the relation between 'religious' text and music. At the heart of the overall enterprise of the monastery was a 'belief' which could in principle be given

theological articulation. But what if or when the notion of 'God' in a culture becomes registered as essentially incomprehensible or indefinable? Some contemporary compositions seem to be presented as apophatic versions of 'sacred' or 'spiritual' music premised upon a claim that music can itself somehow make accessible the otherwise ineffable. Some modern music may have had its entangled origins in liturgical ritual and religious belief but is now in practice dissociated from both ritual and any definite belief. What is perhaps left is 'believing in music'.

Moses und Aron

These considerations can be encapsulated by reflecting upon Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*. The work is highly unlikely ever to be staged in Canterbury Cathedral, so my excuse for considering it here is simply that I still recall the impact upon me of listening to a live BBC radio broadcast of Schoenberg's opera from Covent Garden in 1965. Shortly afterwards, I sat a theology exam. The paper had a laconic rubric: 'Students should attempt *either* three questions from section A *or* attempt section B.' Section A contained some predictable theological chestnuts, familiar questions concerning proofs for the existence of God, the difficulty of defining the incarnation or clarifying the concept of eternity. Section B consisted of a single question, or invitation: 'Discuss Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*.' The exam was set by Tom Worden, whose *The Psalms Are Christian Prayer* I mentioned earlier. I am once again tempted. But I will confine myself to a few remarks.

Schoenberg first attempted to compose the work in 1931-33 and the specific historical-political context of 1930s Germany is audible in the frenzied parody of popular and nationalistic German music incorporated in the dance around the Golden Calf in Act II. Arguably we can also register, in the depiction of potential mob violence and manipulative authoritarian leadership of the Israelites in the desert, an allusion to the looming danger of *Der Fuhrer*.

Schoenberg's reaffirmed Jewish identity and his pro-Zionist stance, already asserted in his unperformed 1926 prose drama *Der biblische Weg* ('The Biblical Way') is again evident, while his highly controversial 12-tone compositional technique is sometimes taken to be referenced in the 12 letters of the title, with its unusual spelling of 'Aron'. Another account cites his superstition about 13.

The opera presents a dramatised representation of the biblical episode of Moses encountering a presumably divine voice from the Burning Bush and subsequently undertaking the liberation of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. His brother Aron is designated as Moses's persuasive spokesman to the fearful and reluctant Jewish tribes, yet is himself later responsible for setting up an idolatrous golden calf even while Moses is receiving the tablets of the commandments directly from God.

The work is structured upon a fissure between Aron's fluent populist rhetoric, both supporting and subverting Moses, and the insistent apophatic rigour of Moses, his refusal to countenance any other formulation than the starkest affirmation of the utter inconceivability of God. Throughout, Moses speaks in austere *sprechtstimmung* mode, while Aron's high tenor seeks to transform what Moses says into a lyrically accessible musical idiom. The form enacts the notion that there is a fundamental abyss between our futile attempts at conceptual articulation and our propensity for reassuring melodic utterance, dramatising the metaphysical or philosophical contrast between a God who is beyond our intellectual reach and those semi-imaginary objects onto which we project our affective desires and loyalties, including not merely a golden idol but even the future Promised Land itself.

While Aron's acquiescence in appeasing popular fears and demands clearly culminates in an orgiastic blood-letting in honour of a man-made image, Moses's position becomes ever more remorselessly uncompromising. When Aron himself adopts or appropriates Moses' opening phrase (bars 10-11) '*Unvorstellbarer Gott*' (inconceivable God) at bars 183-5 Moses immediately insists further: *Unvorstellbarer, weil unsichtbarer, weil unuberblickbar, weil unendliche, weil ewig, weil allgegenwärtiger, weil allmächtig. Nur einer ist allmächtig.* (183-186: Not conceived because unseen, can never be measured, everlasting, eternal, because ever present, and almighty). When Aron objects that according to Moses 'none can see him, none can picture him' and demands of Moses 'can you love what you do not even image?', Moses relentlessly insists that the people must further 'purify your thinking' (*Reinige dein Denken*, .208.)

However, Moses's stance is already undermined by the opening scene, in which, contrary to Moses's denial of the possibility of delivering to the people a comprehensible divine message, God is nevertheless presented as speaking clearly to Moses himself and as explicitly authorising Aron's role as his intermediating messenger. Moreover, it is by direct divine command that Aron, rather than Moses, is able to produce the miracles which initially sustain the people's belief and confidence in Moses himself.

The overlapping multi-voice polyphony of the voice of God in the burning bush scene which begins *Moses und Aron* contrasts with Moses's own *sprechtstimmung* which cannot communicate to the people of Israel what he believes he has heard from that divine voice. The devastating realisation finally dawns upon Moses that the very words he himself deploys are susceptible to the same critique which he proclaims against the musical renditions of Aron. His own asymptotic utterances are themselves a kind of false image, an idol to be repudiated, as are even the very tablets of the ten commandments with their apparently divine inscriptions. In the final scene of the unfinished opera Moses recognises that the only words available to him to express his indefinable and inarticulable meaning are not only utterly and intrinsically inadequate but themselves a mirage or idol. The music for the libretto of Act III was never completed, so the fundamental 'action' of

the opera occurs in the relation between the first words uttered by Moses, that God is 'infinite, omnipresent, unperceived, inconceivable' ('*Einziger, ewiger, allgegenwärtiger, unsichtbarer, und unvorstellbarer Gott*' 8-11) and the final words of Act II, spoken by Moses: '*O Wort, du Wort, das mihr fehlt*' (1133): 'O Word , thou Word, that I lack'.

The opera clearly dramatises some of the issues considered earlier in relation to the 'affective object' of music and the discussion of the relation between text and music. Insofar as Moses's *sprechtstimmung* attempts to speak on behalf of the voice of God, and Aron's singing is his attempt to convey Moses' spoken message, there is a multi-tiered structural analogy which implies that the true 'word' of God is as far removed from Moses's speech as Aron's music is from Moses' *sprechtstimmung*, and perhaps further implies that the actual and unfinished opera is equally as remote from that originally envisaged by Schoenberg.

In particular, the focus of any performance tends to be not directly upon the issue of Moses's apophatic struggle or even upon the character of Moses but rather upon the adequacy or otherwise of any actor's attempt convincingly to realise the demanding role of Moses. Moreover, the musical staging of the biblical text risks being as much a betrayal of the injunction against images as the Golden Calf itself, since the extraordinary stage directions indicate and invite a production as spectacular and seductive as any Wagnerian extravaganza. The difficulty and challenge of producing the opera further tempts today's directors to offer experimentally imaginative and technologically innovative solutions which inevitably distract the audience and avert attention from the very issues posed by the opera.

The only passage of *Moses und Aron* staged in Schoenberg's lifetime was predictably that reckoned as most attractive to an audience not necessarily captivated by theological aporias, the worship of the Golden Calf in Act II, scene 3, including the stage directions:

> *the slaughtermen slaughter the beasts, throw hunks of meat to the crowd: there is fighting: some rush about, clawing bloody lumps of meat, devouring them raw:… A sacrificial dance… The Tribal Chieftains butcher the Youth… Women give each other jewellery, fabrics, etc, men weapons, tools etc… General wild drunkenness… Extravagant dancing… Orgy of drunkenness and dancing… Four Naked Virgins step before the calf… The priests embrace, kiss the virgins: behind each couple a girl stands, wielding a long knife and a jug to catch the blood…… Wild dancing throughout… Orgy of sexual excess… A naked youth darts forward, seizes the girl, rips the clothes from her, hoists her high, runs carrying her to the altar… Many men do likewise, stripping themselves, stripping women, bearing them off as the youth has done .. Pausing briefly at the altar.*

One recent production resorted to enormous video screens showing in effect a pornographic snuff movie. Another presented the scene as a bling-laden orgiastic celebration of the notorious Bullingdon Club, featuring the

Seventy Elders as almost Boris Johnson clones. The 1965 Covent Garden production pragmatically hired four professional strippers from the Raymond Revuebar next door, with a predictable nightly influx of leering customers from that establishment. The 2009 Ruhrtriennale production harnessed a stunning display of advanced theatre technologies and digital special effects which made Aron's impressively realised magical powers the highlight of the evening. Perhaps only the 1974 Straub-Huillet minimalist film version has both been completely faithful to the music score and foregrounded the contradictory character of visually staging it, including a recognition of the difficulty of presenting the claim to ancient historicity of the biblical text.

Such productions, however, perhaps also insinuate a quite alternative reading of the multi-tiered compositional structure: that while the commercial entertainment attractions of staged orgies, dramatised carnage, and spectacular special effects, are far removed from the rigorous converging demands of Schoenberg's opera, so his own stretching of musical possibilities beyond both the basic half-spoken range of Moses's *sprechtstimmung* and the more traditional virtuoso demands of Aron's operatic singing role indicates that beyond both registers there is nevertheless the tantalising glimpse of an ever higher range of musical perfection, perhaps even a rumour of angels.

Not unlike the contrast between 'monastic' and 'scholastic' theology as expounded by Leclercq, Schoenberg's opera mainly suggests an intrinsic irreconcilability. If a text is composed of statements, propositions, arguments, analyses, understanding, while music expresses emotion and feeling, affirmation rather than argument, contemplation rather than question, confession rather than comprehension, any attempt at "believing, in music" risks an impasse. Unless an essentially word-less emotional 'experience' is offered as the very 'content' constituting the 'belief'. However, that an act of belief might include the affirmation of certain formulated doctrines is a position remote from those who regard an act of faith as fundamentally a personal affirmation, an expression or confession of an emotion, perhaps a sense of sin, of being saved, of being overwhelmed by a heart-felt feeling of forgiveness or of joyous confidence. It is these emotions which are now frequently assumed to characterise 'sacred music'.

dissociation of sensibility

Again, Schoenberg's contemporary T. S. Eliot can provide a useful phrase. In his 1921 essay on 'the metaphysical poets' Eliot suggested a far-reaching thesis, that in 17th-century England a 'dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered.' Whatever Eliot intended by the phrase, and however inadequately it offered a convincing diagnosis of a cultural fissure located by Eliot in, or projected upon, 17th-century literature, we

can now rather more ominously regard the phrase as a gloss upon Eliot's own post-World War I Europe, and perhaps as even more appositely upon current cultural-political developments.

In that context, Eliot's comments partly anticipated the grim perspective of the 'eclipse of reason' and the rise of the authoritarian personality outlined by Benjamin's colleagues in the Frankfurt School. What their work envisaged was a development in the dialectic of the Enlightenment, no longer a possible reconciliation or positive re-association between intellect and emotion but rather a different combinatory, intellect not being supported by emotional commitment but emotion taking predominance over intellect. Or an even more ominous fusion in which an emotional identification itself continuously generates a species of false intellectual content, a justification of an emotional attachment by spurious reasoning and a blatant repudiation of rational investigation.

As I write, nearly half the population of the USA seems fervently to support as their next President a narcissist incapable of distinguishing between truth and fantasy, willing to disseminate endless blatant falsehoods, and eager to create and perpetuate himself as a cult figure. It is no surprise to find that among the core groupings of his fanatical support are Christian evangelicals alongside white supremacists, climate change deniers, and conspiracy believers impervious to evidence. Trump's MAGA followers may currently be the most powerful religious movement in the recent history of America. Complete with its own chants, hymns, and proclamations of the Chosen One.

murder in the cathedral

We can finally return to the Canterbury Festival of 1935 with which I began this somewhat extended essay by considering the refurbished Christ Church Gate as almost a partial facsimile of itself. The most memorable contribution to the festival was T. S. Eliot's verse play *Murder in the Cathedral*, which was staged in the Chapter House. The published text is easily available but my account also refers to the 'Acting Edition' used in the original 1935 production and published by H. J. Goulden for the 'Friends of Canterbury Cathedral'.

Eliot had been sceptical of attempts by Gilbert Murray and others to revive the classical form of Greek drama with a choreographed chorus declaiming verse as the framework for staging tableaux of encounters between a limited number of protagonists. The Greek chorus offered a commentary upon the action and participated almost as representatives of the city, the *polis*. One motif in classical Greek plays was the fate of a central protagonist which evoked legendary cultic rites involving the sacrifice of a human victim or the ritual slaying of a ruler.

Eliot's play was however also influenced by a rather different model. Mediaeval religious drama had partly developed from moments in the

liturgy when the biblical text was semi-dramatised, as in the Easter ritual when the women arrive at Christ's empty tomb and are met by an Angel with the query *Quem Quaeritis* "whom are you seeking?" This quasi-dramatic exchange was first recorded in England in the *Regularis Concordia* and some basic dramatic elements in the performance of the liturgy go back at least to the 10th century:

> On Maundy Thursday (*In Coena Domini*) Ethelwold's custumal says that at the end of the last antiphon in the Gospel two boys should sing *Kyrie Eleison* in the southern apse . . and two more answer *Christe Eleison* in the northern, two should call out in the western part *Domine miserere nobis*, and the whole choir answer *Christus dominus factus est obediens usque ad mortem*, and all this should be done three times.
>
> (M. Bateson, 'Rules for Monks . .', *English Historical Review* 9, 1894)

Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* was clearly shaped by aspects of liturgical practice. The play can almost be regarded as a variation upon the Office of Saint Thomas which we considered earlier. The liturgical choir is now a Greek chorus as a crowd of Canterbury women. Their dramatically spoken lines take the place of the responsories between the lessons or hagiographical *historiae* of Matins. Eliot's play focuses on Becket's death and consists of two Acts with an interlude and a kind of coda. The central protagonists are Becket and the four Knights who killed him but the chorus of Women of Canterbury is also central to the action.

Act I opens in late 1170 just before Christmas with the Canterbury women awaiting the arrival of Becket from his seven years of exile in France. The women recite their verse lines throughout the play in a highly charged form of choral speaking, which the original cast had intensively rehearsed for weeks. Their opening words can be delivered with a powerful impact, initially creating an ominous atmosphere of fear and expectation, almost a palpable dread without a clear focus but with a sense of forthcoming danger and threat. The emotion evoked and instilled in the audience is ambivalent trepidation.

> Here let us stand, close by the Cathedral. Here let us wait.
> Are we drawn by danger? Is it the knowledge of safety that draws our feet
> Towards the Cathedral? What danger can be
> For us, the poor, the poor women of Canterbury? What tribulation
> With which we are not already familiar? There is no danger
> For us, and there is no safety in the Cathedral. Some presage of an act
> Which our eyes are compelled to witness, has forced our feet
> Towards the Cathedral. We are forced to bear witness.

Act I then presents not the Knights who will kill Becket but four 'Tempters' (in 1935 the same actors played both Tempters and Knights).

Speaking directly to Becket three Tempters variously recall his earlier life as a courtier, administrator, and politician, tempting him to return to that privileged and prosperous way of life. Becket easily rejects these blandishments, holding firm to his obedience to his ecclesiastical position and refusing to abandon his opposition to the King's attempt to exercise authority over the church and clergy. The Fourth Tempter is however unexpected and more insidious. The new temptation is precisely to become a martyr. A truncated quotation is inadequate but the core lines include:

> *Tempter* : . . think, Thomas, think, of glory after death.
> When king is dead, there is another king,
> And one more king is another reign.
> King is forgotten, when another shall come;
> Saint and Martyr rule from the tomb.
> Think , Thomas , think of enemies dismayed,
> Creeping in penance, frightened of a shade;
> Think of pilgrims, standing in line
> Before the glittering, jewelled shrine,
> From generation to generation
> Bending the knee in supplication.
> Think of the miracles, by God's grace.
> And think of your enemies in another place.
> *Thomas* : I have thought of these things.
> *Tempter* : That is why I tell you.

The Fourth Tempter ironically repeats Becket's own earlier words:

> You know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.
> You know and do not know, that action is suffering,
> And suffering action. Neither does the agent suffer
> Nor the patient act. But both are fixed
> In an eternal action, an eternal patience
> To which all must consent that it may be willed
> And which all must suffer that they may will it,
> That the pattern may subsist, that the wheel may turn and still
> Be forever still.

The essential distinction here is between that ultimately futile earthly 'succession' and history, which we discussed in relation to the tombs in the nave, and the lure of mediaeval notions of time as circular return, both distinct from the promise of an 'eternal' life. In the 1951 film of *Murder in the Cathedral* produced by George Hoelleringer Eliot himself played the Fourth Tempter as a voice-over with no physical character visible on the screen, and clearly the temptation is here articulated not only as from within

Becket's own mind and conscience but also as the voice of the Eliot who had by then composed *Four Quartets*.

The exit of the Fourth Tempter is followed by at least five minutes of speeches by the chorus and the three Priests while Becket remains on stage but silent. At the end of which Becket finally declares "Now is my way clear." I once acted Becket in an amateur production, and there are no stage directions in the play-text to guide the actor during those speeches. All he can do for several minutes while the choruses continue is perhaps to sit with his head in his hands. Or adopt some kind of praying posture? And does he look at the audience, turn his back, or close his eyes? Becket is making this crucial decision in his own long empty silence. One might perhaps recall a comment much earlier with reference to Descartes and George Boole, that there is an inaccessible layer or 'black box' moment in any critical decision, or train of thought, or even an AI computer operation. The stage time between the exit of the Fourth Tempter and the end of the choral speeches occupied 49 lines in 1935 and nearly 70 lines in, for example, the 1963 edition. Eliot's lack of explicit stage action allows him to leave open the extent to which Becket might even have succumbed to the Fourth Tempter's suggestion of a glorious martyrdom. When he finally declares "Now is my way clear, now is the meaning plain" it is not clear to the audience how this internal confirmation or invisible transformation has been arrived at. The crucial lines are:

> Temptation shall not come in this kind again.
> The last temptation is the greatest treason:
> To do the right deed for the wrong reason.

In 1935 the short speech of 17 lines following his decision was addressed directly to the audience and concluded the Act. In later versions that speech expanded, or was restored, to some 45 lines. Yet how can Becket's own words remove any suspicion of self deception? One might recall the dispute about Saint Anselm's 'refusal' to be made Archbishop of Canterbury.

In the 1935 staging Becket moved immediately to deliver a sermon which takes up nearly ten minutes and provides the core theological position and problem of the play. The sermon is addressed to the Canterbury women but also dirrectly to the audience as if it were a congregation attending an actual service. The sermon follows the standard procedure of a mediaeval homily, elaborating upon a brief biblical text. In this case *Luke* 2 : 14, the angels singing at Christmas: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.'

Becket's sermon is presented as having been delivered on Christmas Day and emphasises that the liturgy 'today' (*Hodie*) celebrates both birth and death at the same time:

> . . at the moment when we celebrate the Birth of our Lord we shall be re-enacting His Passion and Death; at the moment when we rejoice in His Coming for the salvation of men, we offer again to God His Body and Blood in sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. It was in this same night that has just passed, that a multitude of the heavenly host appeared before the Shepherds of Bethlehem, saying "Glory to God in the highest, and in earth peace, goodwill towards men"; in this same night then, of all the year, that we celebrate at once the Birth of our Lord and his Passion and Death upon the Cross. Beloved, as the world sees, this is to behave in a strange fashion: for who in the world will both mourn and rejoice at once for the same reason? For either joy will be over-borne by mourning, or mourning will be cast out by joy; so it is only in these our Christian mysteries that we can rejoice and mourn at once for the same reason.

The message of the angels concerning 'peace' is then considered in terms of Christ offering a different notion of peace. Becket finally reflects upon the concept of martyrdom, emphasising that martyrdom is God's will, a sacrifice which is part of God's overall design, and that on the feast of the first martyr Stephen, the day after Christmas, the liturgy again both rejoices and mourns at the same time. What Becket / Eliot is constructing is a 'structure of feeling' (or 'a new art emotion') combining apparently opposed emotions but shaped by the proposed consonance between grasping the interwoven notions of personal martyrdom and of God's overall power in history.

In 1935 Act II began with an explicit reference to the liturgical feasts for the days immediately after Christmas, with three priests each singing the respective *Introits* for the consecutive Offices of St Stephen the first martyr (26th December), St John the Evangelist (27th) and the massacre of the Holy Innocents, the children killed by Herod (28th). This takes the action to 29th December which is signalled by the liturgical text *Guadeamus*, here pre-emptively appropriate for the common Office of a Saint and Martyr. The priests' words include a similarly proleptic reference to weeping in Rama, that text which we earlier saw was to become part of the proper Office for Saint Thomas, as if Becket had already been liturgically recognised with a specific feast-day. Then the Knights arrive. Historical time is supervening upon liturgical time and vice-versa.

The formal pattern of Act I is partly repeated, with the first three knights again presenting, as in Act I, reminders of Thomas's early career but now the rehearsal of those same facets of his life operates as accusations of pride, arrogance, and power-seeking. Again this echoes a liturgical office, a pattern of readings, anthems, responsories, so that the exposition of Becket's career figures twice but with different effect, as the 'lessons' (*historia*e) in the liturgy. The play correctly follows the historical sources in having two encounters between Becket and the Knights, the first in

Becket's Hall and the second in the Cathedral itself. At their second entrance the Knights drunkenly sing a parody of the choral speaking of the Women of Canterbury. After angry exchanges partly modelled upon the contemporary accounts we discussed much earlier, Becket is finally killed.

At this point there is a sudden dramatic change of address and mode as the Knights forcefully present self-justifying arguments directly to the audience, deploying in effect another persuasive temptation but with a new target. The Knights' presentation combines elements of courtroom argument, press conference, political broadcast. The strategy is to offer a variety of explanations and justifications, from which the audience is prompted to choose, perhaps preferring one account rather than another, seeing partial merit in each, weighing up their jury-like verdict. Yet perhaps almost unnoticeably there is no concluding spokesperson for the quite alternative framework of martyrdom.

The Knight' secular justifications propose in effect an authorised assassination but the audience has to remind itself to weigh these secular versions of what they have seen against the anticipatory interpretation offered by Becket in his sermon. Yet we have not actually seen any evidence to support that alternative case. The play provides no divine intervention or heavenly endorsement, no angel, no miracle or other validation by the divine. To put any such element on stage would be to step outside the credible limits or norms of modern dramatic representation, and of secular understanding of history. As Eliot was to find with his attempted representation of the Furies in a later play.

In our own theatre production at this point we drew the stage curtain to conceal Becket's body lying on the altar while the chorus came in front of the curtain for their communal lamentation. Behind the curtain the set was rapidly converted into a television studio with cameras broadcasting the speeches by the Knights, who after a quick costume-change appeared in modern suits and displaying military medals. The situation was presented in the format of a meeting of a town council, or the office-holders of a private club, justifying a perhaps unwelcome but necessary decision. The Knights' speeches were delivered in relaxed colloquial and almost parodic mode but with persuasive rhetorical address to the audience. And then concluded with the ominous warning for everyone to go to their homes:

> I suggest that you now disperse quietly to your homes. Please be careful not to loiter in groups at street corners, and please do nothing that might provoke any public outbreak .

In 1935 after the Knights exited, the priests delivered some brief prayers and the Women of Canterbury then spoke or chanted what was almost an English version of the *Te Deum*, with the hymn in Latin also audible from a small choir singing on a temporary balcony over the entrance to the chapter house. The final chorus recognises that both the Priests and Women of

Canterbury have all needed forgiveness and the text concludes with a prayer to Thomas.

the last temptation

It is the on-stage women's chorus who are directly threatened by the final dispersal order given by the Knights. The temptation they have had to negotiate is not promises of enjoying riches or power, as directed at Becket in Act I, but rather as demonstrated in their own behaviour earlier: to settle for acquiescence, preferring a quiet life, avoiding involvement, not taking sides. The sign of a change in the Women of Canterbury in the 1935 production was not only their reciting a version of the *Te Deum* but their leaving the chapter house at the end of the performance to process around the cloister, holding candles and chanting a litany in which the new Saint Thomas was numbered. It is their transformation from an initial fearful stance which might be regarded as an implicit sign of the power of the new Saint, a miracle not of physical healing but of moral transformation, from fear and cowardice to courage, though that is expressed only in their words.

The chorus not only represents the women of Canterbury but guides or shapes the emotional reaction of the actual audience. They operate as giving voice to the pity and fear which the audience might experience itself, since in 1935 the audience too faced the temptations of political indifference, apathy, preference for a quiet life, non-involvement, not taking sides. Eliot was later to make clear that in the Knights' speeches he deliberately included overtones of contemporary authoritarian political movements and the kinds of justification routinely offered for political murder and increasing repression.

Individual members of the audience are also faced not only with making up their minds what they believe about Becket but what they themselves believe in. The concluding justifications by the four Knights provide entirely secular interpretations of Becket's death in terms of the political conflicts between church and state which had figured throughout the history of the cathedral's relations to the monarchy. The sermon delivered by Becket between the two Acts provides a theological reflection upon the nature of martyrdom, but the play as a whole reflects upon a more general relation between action and passivity, suffering and passion, seen in terms of Christ's own Passion.

Martyrdom is an act of God while the echoes of Greek drama also take us back to an ancient version of human sacrifice, which even if desired or accepted by the victim remains a kind of involuntary death. Becket's decision is not far from that of the victim who dances herself to death in Stravinsky's 1913 *Rite of Spring* or even Schoenberg's naked virgins in *Moses und Aron*. In the 1935 Chapter House performance there was an implicit invitation for the audience to join in the singing of the *Te Deum*, perhaps *sotto voce*, or at least as a form of emotional identification, but also perhaps

to participate in the procession around the cloister. To use a term previously explained, this version of a 'literary conversion' was presumably not available in a West End production. Perhaps some in the audience might indeed have *sotto voce* participated in the singing of the *Te Deum* but only as part of enjoying the dramatic experience without any personal religious or implicitly political commitment.

In other words, the most insidious temptation Eliot has constructed was in effect for the audience to appreciate *Murder in the Cathedral* as a play, as a work of art, and to applaud the skill with which Eliot had composed his quasi-religious historical drama and even tackled the contemporary urgent issue of the relation between state and church in the era of fascism. The structural emotion which is postulated by Eliot in Becket's sermon is to both mourn and rejoice, and one could critically appreciate Eliot's newly revived artistic genre of 'verse drama' as providing an innovative 'art emotion', a novel variation upon tragedy, and a pleasantly unusual evening in the theatre.

And everybody could go happily to their homes, satisfied with having watched 'a new Eliot play'. The most insidious temptation of all.

*

CODA

This essay is already too long. It needs to come to an end. Even if prematurely. I originally intended to include several more locations in my wanderings around the cathedral, but will now have to conclude without them. Not that I am offering any 'conclusions'. That is up to you, reflecting upon your visit.

However, next in line would have been Saint Michael's Chapel in the south-west transept, occupying a position almost parallel to the Martyrdom in the north-west transept. It is normally barred to visitors by an iron gate, partly because the chapel is small and the floorspace is largely occupied by an imposing monument to Lady Margaret Holland (1385-1439) and her two husbands, entombed next to her, John Beaufort, Earl of Somerset (1371-1410) and Thomas, Duke of Clarence (1387–1421). Admittedly, an unusual arrangement, but not of great interest to me.

However, the chapel is also dedicated to the Kentish regiments, and the walls are crowded with memorials to numerous military figures, with several faded regimental banners hanging from the ceiling. Given the peculiar status of Michael, oddly regarded as both Archangel and Saint, I might have further explored various strange notions about angels. The roles attributed to the Archangel Michael in popular Christian belief included that of God's chief warrior combating the devil in the 'war in heaven', that somewhat incoherent explanation of how evil ever entered into the divine creation.

An obvious topic to consider would therefore have been the highly contentious history of religiously provoked and endorsed warfare, as commemorated and celebrated by the chapel's various memorial plaques and statues. Whether a cathedral is the appropriate place for honouring and even celebrating slaughter could have been pursued, as briefly noted earlier in relation to the imperial military monuments in the nave. I might have considered, for example, the biblical justifications recently offered by some Israeli officials for the genocidal onslaught on Gaza being conducted even as I write (2024). Or perhaps tried to think more about the passage on 'peace' in Becket's sermon in *Murder in the Cathedral.* But the relations between religions and war, holy and otherwise, are both too pressing and depressing for any merely brief consideration.

A segment on the Chapter House would have considered the relationship between the different notions of 'law' and of 'rule'. The Benedictine Rule, a chapter of which was read each day in this assembly hall of the monastery, gave its name to the 'chapter' house. The related but distinct notion of 'law' might be traced from what is sometimes claimed as the first vernacular law code in Europe, which was perhaps partly a bye-product of Saint Augustine's arrival in Canterbury (see Patrick Wormald, *The making of English law,* vol. 1, 1999*,* and Brian Simpson, *Legal Theory and Legal History:*

Essays on the Common Law, 1987). It would have been worth exploring the differences between 'following a rule' and 'obeying the law', with reference not least to current issues around populist authoritarianism.

I also intended to consider the Cathedral library and the central role of books and writing in the monastic way of life, compared with the fading function of printed books in contemporary e-culture. This essay is itself both a deliberate throwback to a much older style of writing a book and also an exploratory application of the recently available technologies of self-publishing and print on demand.

I particularly regret not finding a space to consider the work of Rowan Williams, perhaps the only Archbishop of Canterbury to be compared with Anselm. His impressive range of work from the study of the Arians (*Arius: Heresy and Tradition,* 1987) to, for example, the 2013 Gifford lectures on language, *The Edge of Words,* directly raise issues around the peculiar discipline of theology. The title of his collection of essays, *Wrestling with Angels* (2007), would have provided an apposite link to several themes elsewhere in this book.

I had considered a segment on the Cathedral gift shop. I wonder if at least Rowan Williams' own books are in the gift shop these days. One brief comment must suffice. The CD mentioned earlier entitled *The Canterbury Tradition* and copyrighted by the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury in 2013, has the following sleeve note:

> For hundreds of years, since the foundation of the monastic community around its Priory Church, the music of the regular services has been maintained by a team of singers whose job it is to enhance the beauty and dignity of the worship. This tradition has been continued and expanded during this time, and today the Cathedral choir and its music are at the centre of the Cathedral's life, seeking not only to maintain the treasures of the past but also to find new and exciting music to add to the kaleidoscopic variety available, not only from England but from many parts of the Christian world.

Despite that reference to 'the monastic community', rather obliquely assimilated to a 'team of singers', there is nothing on this CD representative of or evoking the 'sound of music' that was heard in Canterbury Cathedral from the sixth to the sixteenth century. The pieces on the CD are by the following composers, with their dates in brackets:

> James Turle (1802 – 1882), Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847), Joseph Barnby (1838 – 1896), Gabrielle Fauré (1845 – 1924), Henry Walford Davies (1869 - 1941), William Walton (1902 - 1983), Michael Tippett (1905 - 1998), Gerald Knight (1908 - 1979) and Grayston Ives (born 1948).

There is also one piece by Henry Purcell. And two pieces by Orlando Gibbons, who is commemorated by a plaque in the nave for the somewhat accidental reason that he happened to die in Canterbury on his one visit to the place, and I am content to leave him in peace. The only composer in this list who was actually attached to Canterbury Cathedral is Gerald Knight, who was organist from 1937 to 1952, and the only composition with a specific connection to the Cathedral is the *Te Deum* commissioned from Grayston Ives for the enthronement of Archbishop Carey in 1991. We are assured that it was 'received with rapture'. Another art emotion to enjoy?

I hope I have at least added to your awareness of several other figures associated for various reasons with the Cathedral – especially during its long mediaeval period. As an alternative to the gift shop segment I thought of simply listing some of the myriad books which underpin this essay and which I would, unrealistically, expect to find in a cathedral gift shop.

However, as was perhaps inevitable in trying to write about as complex a subject as a cathedral, there seems no good way to conclude. I began the book partly because visiting the cathedral often prompted some half-formed thoughts, concerning the sheer density of the history of the place and the people once associated with it, forgotten as well as famous. I increasingly found myself thinking about various issues and problems in a number of scholarly fields and academic disciplines, all of which impinge upon my response to aspects of the cathedral. My various 'considerings' have left me still with half-thoughts and tentative arguments which are probably not quite coherent, but I hope by now to have a more adequate reaction to the complexity of this strange building at the heart of Canterbury.

*

Another prompt for writing about this cathedral was that for a few years I volunteered to design and produce interactive CD-ROMs to accompany exhibitions in the cathedral library, which could be sold as souvenir items to raise money for the severely cash-starved library. These multimedia presentations focused variously on mediaeval herbals, a rare 17th century Japanese atlas, Victorian scrapbooks and domestic albums, William Gostling's guide book to Canterbury, the early printed books in the library, and so on, indicating the range of a fascinating but under-resourced library.

Such CD-ROMs, once a cutting-edge technology for combining texts and images, were briefly the latest phase in the development of the reproduction technologies as sketched by Walter Benjamin in his 1936 essay. More sophisticated websites and vastly improved internet access soon rendered them outdated, as music-streaming has largely displaced music CDs.

However, in many respects the cathedral still exists predominantly in an earlier regime of image reproduction. 'Canterbury Cathedral' is often envisaged mainly as a collage of images, whether as experienced on an

actual visit, recording one's own digital snaps or videos, or as represented by glossy photographs in an illustrated guide-book or on a website. Moreover, most guides to Canterbury Cathedral focus on the building, the physical architecture, the tombs, the stained-glass windows – but treated primarily as visible historical and artistic objects to be looked at, rather than as prompting any complex response to the once sacred character of the cathedral. Certainly, the current liturgy is not something most tourists eagerly come to participate in, though they may observe afternoon Evensong just 'for the experience'.

Overall, actually visiting and exploring the building perhaps generates a version of what Eliot called a 'new art emotion', as now almost the main rationale for the continuing existence of the cathedral itself. The cathedral hasn't quite undergone what Benjamin called a loss of 'aura' and it can still prompt a sense of awe, or at least curiosity. But at considerable cost. The cathedral needs around £30,000 each day to operate, and is dependent upon donations as well as entry-ticket prices, with no direct government subsidy. Eliot's 1935 drama was part of a Festival the function of which was to raise money as well as to encourage people to visit and worship at the Cathedral. *Murder in the Cathedral* did have a commercial theatre run and some money was channelled back to the cathedral coffers.

suggestions?

So let me make some final suggestions. I can propose a '*quaestio*' for you to debate. *Pro* and *Contra*. *Sic et non*. In the San Marco Basilica in Venice if you want to attend Mass or simply pray, you are ushered into an enclosed side chapel so as not to interfere with the tourists gazing at the wonderful mosaics. Similarly, in Canterbury, directing people to the Dean's Chapel for private prayer and having an hourly announcement reminding people that they are in a sacred space seems a somewhat half-hearted compromise. It used to be the pilgrims who were kept away from distracting the monks.

So, if now the main attraction of visiting the Cathedral is to experience a satisfactory 'art emotion' should the Dean and Chapter copy some modernising ideas from the 'Canterbury Tales Experience' which is available just off the High Street in a disused church, where various incidents from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are presented as tableaux with automata effigies and life-like figures, and staff are suitably costumed in mediaeval dress.

Why not offer 'The Cathedral Experience' by, for example, having photogenic actors and singers dressed as monks and providing an impressive display of mediaeval liturgical splendour five times a day, with Becket's murder staged at three o'clock every afternoon and including the organised taking of 'selfies' with the Knights. When no live performances are available, a showing of the film of *Murder in the Cathedral* could be offered in the Chapter House.

Live dramatisations appropriate to particular feast-days might be presented. Saint Stephen being stoned to death, or Saint Catherine's torture on the wheel, could be decorously re-enacted. The legendary encounter between the devil's nose and Saint Dunstan, to the accompaniment of his self-performing harp, might particularly please the children. One model to imitate could be how National Trust properties and stately homes stage a mediaeval banquet or a jousting match, or Curved Knot re-enacts Civil War battles.

After all, the 'Changing of the Guard' at Buckingham Palace or the annual 'Trooping of the Colour' no longer serve any convincing military function and those occasions can easily be staged by suitably trained actors and extras who are not actually serving military personnel. The supposedly ancient Royal Coronation ceremony now serves no intelligible function that could not be performed in a much simpler and more crowd-pleasing fashion than the present rather over-lengthy operation. There is no reason why such a useful tourist attraction couldn't be repeated every Saturday, perhaps with some more expensive tickets allowing one to be personally presented to Royal Family members, played by appropriately noble actors or suitable celebrities. One could even envisage such a replica coronation being circulated each month between Westminster Abbey, Saint Paul's, and Canterbury Cathedral itself, like a mediaeval king 'wearing his crown' at different locations for Whitsun, Christmas, and Easter. Occasionally, someone could even win a gold lottery ticket to meet the real king or queen. Or even crown one, as 'Archbishop of Canterbury' for the day. After all, the mediaeval cathedrals were the home for mediaeval mystery plays and the early development of drama.

The Cathedral could obviously provide a stunning setting for many such 'experiences' just as it has regularly done for music concerts. It could all bring in a great deal of income, enough to maintain the fabric and even generate donations to worthy causes, which seems to be the other main function and activity of the Cathedral.

And why not take this logic a little further? A 'historic' Communion Service could be performed as an authentic representation, incorporating details of the Anglican liturgy from historical versions of the *Book of Common Prayer*. There could even, occasionally, be a proper mediaeval High Mass with full ceremonial. Provided the whole business was, of course, conducted with suitable decorum and not merely as an ecclesiastical imitation of Disneyworld.

Crucially, would it then matter very much if what the visitors were watching was a 'demonstration' rather than "the real thing"? It's not clear whether most tourists would mind if they were watching actors 'performing' prayers or 'enacting' the Eucharist rather than duly authorised clerical personnel. What real difference would it make to people who don't believe anyway? Indeed, what difference would it make in practice to most people who do 'believe'?

After all, one might finally consider, what is left anyway of the belief or the credulity which built this cathedral? Isn't belief itself now a form of (art) emotion, mainly sustained by a long history rather than supported by credible positive assertions. So is it still needed?

*

I once witnessed in China the building of an entire exact replica of an imperial palace because the genuine historical site was not fully excavated and in any case was too fragile to allow tourist visitors to trample all over it. So a complete physical facsimile was constructed some miles away where the tourists could go instead. My Chinese guide happened to have received incorrect premature information as to when it was opening, so we arrived while it was still being painted.

Today, providing an enhanced Virtual Reality experience for remote viewing would be even cheaper and more manageable. Perhaps Canterbury Cathedral could simply be physically mothballed and virtually replaced by a globally available online VR 'experience'.

I also recall visiting the Forbidden City in Beijing shortly before the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations. China was only just beginning to encourage a small amount of foreign tourism, and at the entrance to the Forbidden City there were two gateways, one of which was reserved for paying tourists from overseas, whereas the other much larger gate gave free entry for all Chinese citizens. One could see on the faces of the Chinese visitors going through their gate into the Forbidden City that it was indeed no longer a forbidden city, but a place which now belonged to them, the people.

I started this essay with the Christ Church Gate. In A *History of Canterbury Cathedral,* edited by Patrick Collinson *et. al.* published in 1995, Roger Bowers reminds us (p. 410):

> It may be salutary to recall that at no time before the Reformation were these religious services in any sense at all congregational. The monastery church was the monks' private chapel; lay people had no need of access to its services, and indeed they were expressly excluded from them. They could enter only as pilgrims seeking access to the shrines of the saints. The inhabitants of the city attended to their religious devotions in their own parish churches; only the very greatest of visiting dignitaries, whose presence did honour to the monastery, were welcome to attend upon the monks' devotions in the Cathedral.

In the 1540s Henry VIII, that accidental kingly successor, arguably 'liberated' Canterbury from its mediaeval monasteries and opened their doors to all comers, except Becket pilgrims of course.

Which contributed to the development not only of a revamped religion or ecclesiastical regime but, as was earlier suggested in considering the Treasury, significantly enabled a decisive stage in English capitalism with the forced redistribution of accumulated monastic assets. Whether the abrupt cessation of monks' devotions was a cultural loss is debatable, but at least the speed of that unexpected eradication of a whole social, cultural, economic system and way of living may be regarded as almost encouraging since, after nearly five hundred years of established capitalism and with a looming apocalyptic climate catastrophe, a new and urgent transformation, however unlikely, is ever more desperately needed. Even more than in 1935.

*

It seems appropriate to end, obliquely, with some further quotations from Walter Benjamin, whose work has shadowed this whole enterprise. Benjamin owned and treasured as a 'work of art' the painting by Paul Klee which figures in his 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', Thesis IX:

> There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It depicts an angel that appears as though it were being pulled away from something that transfixes it. Its eyes are wide open, its mouth agape, and wings outstretched. The angel of history must look like this. Its face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, it sees a single catastrophe that piles ruin upon ruin and hurls them at its feet. The angel longs to stay, wake the dead, and piece together what has been shattered. But a storm blows from paradise, catching in its wings with such force that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives the angel irresistibly into the future, to which its back is turned, while the pile of ruins before it grows toward the sky. What we call progress is this storm.

Immediately after this, Thesis X begins:

> The subjects which monastic discipline assigned to the friars for meditation were intended to make them disdainful of the world and its actions. The line of thought we are tracing here originates from a similar purpose.

The remark is puzzling. Benjamin was not offering his own considerations as a way of avoiding or averting attention from the ongoing catastrophe which still keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage. On the contrary, they were written at a moment (1940) 'when the politicians in whom the opponents of fascism had placed their hopes lie defeated and reaffirm their defeat through the betrayal of their own cause.'

In 1940 Benjamin could no longer regard either Social Democracy or a Stalinist Communist Party as able to avert the fascist catastrophe. The political programmes of both had disastrously prioritised economic 'growth' above all.

As do almost all current governments, even after a century of increasing climate disaster. The draft Thesis XVIIa already formulated the necessary imperative today:

> Marx says that revolutions are the locomotives of world history. But perhaps it's entirely different. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers – namely the human race – to pull the emergency brake.

Twenty years earlier, Benjamin had tried to launch a periodical entitled *Angelus Novus*. The intention was to critique and undermine the dominant assumptions pervading contemporary ways of thinking about history and economics, law and politics, art and philosophy, a wide-ranging attempt to rethink the shaping of the present catastrophes. He wrote several short unpublished essays, perhaps as drafts for articles in the planned periodical. One brief note was entitled 'capitalism as religion':

> Capitalism is a purely cult religion, perhaps the most extreme that ever existed. In capitalism, everything has meaning only in its relation to the cult; it has no specific dogma, no theology. From this perspective, utilitarianism takes on religious overtones. This manifestation of the cult is linked to a second feature of capitalism: the permanence of the cult. Capitalism is the celebration of a cult without weekdays. There is no day that is not a feast day, in the terrible sense that all its sacred pomp is unfolded before us; each day demanding total devotion from its worshippers. Capitalism has developed as a parasite of Christianity in the West, to the point where Christianity's history is now essentially that of its parasite – capitalism.

The periodical *Angelus Novus* never appeared. An unpublished 'announcement' of its programme concluded:

> . . according to a legend in the Talmud, the angels – who are born anew every instant in countless numbers – are created in order to perish and to vanish into the void, once they have sung their hymn in the presence of God. It is to be hoped that the name of the journal will guarantee it contemporary relevance, which is the only true sort.

Angels, it seems, once provided an indispensable intermediary layer of the world's imagined infrastructure and ontology. If we still believed in them today they would be weeping, not singing.

But their places are now empty. *Sede vacante.* Silent.

*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Since this extravagantly long essay considers a range of issues, I have a correspondingly wide range of debts to friends, colleagues, teachers, and past students, whose input and influence has, over decades, shaped and informed my engagement with the several disciplines involved. The following is therefore both an autobiographical reckoning of those debts and a list of authors whose writings I recommend to any reader constructing their own half-formed thoughts in response to this idiosyncratic work.

At Upholland College in the late 1950s I was taught not just Latin and Greek, European history and advanced maths, but how to read all texts critically, whether biblical texts, by Alexander Jones and Tom Worden, literary works, by Bill Maxwell, or philosophical arguments, by John Gaine. At Cambridge in the late 1960s, St Edmund's House, now a College, comprised a small community of friendly talkative scholars with a predominance of historians and philosophers of science, including Ernan McMullin, Mary Hesse, Olaf Pedersen, Al Shapiro, and Michael Hoskin, theologians such as Nicholas Lash and Sebastian Moore, the always maverick cultural theorist Paul Connerton, and the Nicaraguan critical economist Xabier Gorostiaga. I was also fortunate to be directly influenced by Donald MacKinnon, F. R. Leavis, and Raymond Williams, and for my history Ph.D. to be scrutinised by the formidable E. P. Thompson.

My involvement in *Slant*, alongside Terry Eagleton and Adrian Cunningham, and the ambitious translation program of Sheed & Ward under Neil Middleton and Martin Redfern, later to be emulated by Verso, also helped introduce me to the impressive Dominican trio of Herbert McCabe, Fergus Kerr, and Cornelius Ernst.

At the University of Kent I benefitted from co-taught courses with historians such as Gerhard Benecke, Alf Smyth, Pat Collinson, Andrew Butcher, philosophers Larry Chase and Tony Skillen, and multi-disciplinary colleagues Ben Brewster, John Ellis, Dave Reason, Roger Cardinal, Glenn Bowman, Martin Stanton. Igor Alexander introduced me to early neural nets and I later chaired a humanities-computing degree program with students from both domains. The informal 'Lentils' seminar, organised by David McLellan and Sean Sayers, kept the critical study of marxism alive for several decades.

Successive librarians from Sheila Hingley to Cressida Williams have made the underfinanced resources of the Cathedral Library generously available to me, while numerous antiquarian book dealers have responded to my abstruse searches.

Past students such as Venkat Rao, Kevin Davey, and Stephen Hipkin, have continued to stretch my ageing brain, and old friends like Péter Dávidházi and Gabriel Josipovici have consistently encouraged me finally to finish the procrastinated 'cathedral project'. Thanks to their promptings, it may now be read as the intended linchpin of my several other publications under the imprint of *New Crisis Quarterly*.

Above all, my family, Marion O'Connor, Nicola, and Paul, have been more than angelically patient with my somewhat peculiar preoccupation over far too long a time. I thank them all. Please blame none of them.

Canterbury
29th October, 2024

Canterbury Cathedral, proclaimed a six-year old visitor,
is 'a big building full of stories' and 'it smells of history'.

It's also a World Heritage Site attracting thousands of tourists
who briefly wander around, take photos, and leave.
Probably impressed, and admiring, but often puzzled.

In a short visit it's hard to pin down the 'half-formed thoughts'
and elusive responses the cathedral can prompt or provoke.

Perhaps about history, time, death, the past, but also about
art, science, money, philosophy, belief, politics, and why
for a thousand years monks spent most of their time singing.

This concluding part considers St Anselm's famous argument
about God and puzzles over what it means to think or understand,
including 'artificial thinking'. The essay concludes by tracing some
relations between music and language, belief and emotion.

The cathedral is large, and this essay has grown as I tried
to get some of my own 'half-formed thoughts' into focus. .
Here you can take your time, to browse, skip, pause,
and consider your own thoughts.

Enjoy your visit.

Bernard Sharratt lives in Canterbury
and has had to show friends round the
Cathedral for nearly fifty years.
And still doesn't quite know
what he thinks about it.